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Robert B. Beadle,
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OR, DEADWOOD DICK, JR'S COMPACT.

THE STORY OF A DEADLY REPRISAL.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF THE "DEADWOOD DICK NOVELS,"
"DEADWOOD DICK, JR., NOVELS," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST BLOW.

JUDGE JUSTIN GILBERT, the portly "mayor" and ruling spirit of Cascade City, was in a most unpleasant frame of mind, judging by the troubled scowl that knitted his brows together, as he

OLD AVALANCHE SPRUNG FORWARD WITH A CRY OF JOY, AS HE SAW HIS PARD,
AND SEIZED HIM BY THE MANACLED HANDS.

sat in his office on the lowery, gloomy morning that opens our story.

True, Cascade City was "no great shakes" of a place, nor anything like a genuine city in point of size or importance, being a little mining-town, located in a winding gulch at the foot of a towering mountain, down whose rugged sides a torrent of water poured, in beautiful cascades.

Yet Judge Gilbert was the mayor of the camp, in a practical sense—the one who ruled its destiny, so to speak, and governed it, and administered what justice was administered at all.

He was well-to-do, and one of the recognized first people, and had been agreed upon unanimously as the man most fitted to take charge of ruling the place, and keep matters in general in a healthy and flourishing condition.

This he had succeeded in doing to the infinite satisfaction of most citizens concerned; for before he took hold of the reins, the camp had borne a hard reputation, and was noted as an "unhealthy" place to locate in.

The judge was a portly, substantial appearing person, of a trifle past middle age, and possessed of many sterling qualities, and those who knew him best always had a good word to say of him; his manner was always firm but pleasant, and it was seldom there was not a smile on his full, good-natured face.

This morning was an exception to the rule, however. His face betrayed in its every expression that something was troubling him sorely, and every now and then he would run his fingers through his hair in perplexity, and glance toward the clock, which ticked noisily away upon the wall.

At last there came a knock upon the door, at which a look of eager expectancy dawned upon the judge's face.

"Come in!" he cried out, and thereupon the door opened, and a boy entered.

He was rather rudely dressed, was about fifteen years of age, and possessed a face that was anything but of classic beauty, with its large mouth, pug nose, little, peering eyes.

It was a face, however, which beamed with good nature and intelligence.

In fact, he was a fair specimen of an Eastern street Arab, and such he was, for he had come from Gotham a few weeks before, and entered Mr. Gilbert's employ as a chore-boy, giving his name as Jimmy Junebug.

"Well, James, how did you make out?" the judge demanded, the moment he had entered, as he eagerly scanned his face.

"Didn't make out at all," was the blunt reply. "Wore out a sole o'shoe-leather, an' that's all the good it did."

"Did you make inquiries at each house, as I told you?"

"Yas, every one on 'em. They all looked me over, sized me up like I was a Punch an' Judy figger, an' sed they didn't know nothin' about her."

"Did you inquire of Carrol Classon, and Brick Bloss?"

"You bet on't they both sed they hadn't seen her for a couple o' days!"

Judge Gilbert could not repress a groan.

"My God!" he murmured, "what can have become of her? Surely this is one of the greatest of mysteries. Last night when she retired, she seemed in the best of spirits, and kissed me good-night. This morning when the housekeeper went to call her, she was not in her room, but her bed had been occupied. Supposing she had risen early, and run out to some of the neighbors, I thought nothing of it, until she did not return to breakfast; then my suspicions became aroused that all was not right. My God, what can have become of my child—my darling?"

"Keep a stiff upper lip, guv'nor," Jimmy advised. "She may poke her head in ther door, at most any minute!"

"No! no! If Gracie is not at any of the neighbors' houses, something has happened to her. She has been kidnapped—stolen away from me. She would not go beyond the limits of the camp, for I have often cautioned her of the danger of doing so. No! no! my child surely has been carried off. Are you sure, boy, you visited every habitation in the camp?"

"You bet—sure's there's gray hairs in the butter. Mebbe she tuk a notion to elope wi' somebody?"

"Nonsense! She had only two suitors, and both are in camp, at the present moment. No, I tell you, some one has carried her off, but who could have done it? Boy, I believe you know something about her whereabouts—something you are keeping back from me!" the judge declared, eying him sternly.

At which Jimmy snorted, outright.

"Lordy! What er notion!" he declared. "What w'u'd I wanter go ter tryin' carryin' off girls fer, when I can't half carry myself around? None o' that heavy work fer me, jedge. If I know'd anything 'bout Miss Gracie, I google I'd be tellin' ye!"

"Well, something must be done, and at once!" the judge declared, rising, in desperation. "No pains or expense shall be spared to recover my child. She has been stolen from me, but by whom I have no means of knowing. I will move heaven and earth, but what I find her.

"Now, you, boy, go to McGregor, and tell him I said give a general alarm, suspend all work in the mines, and dispatch parties of men in quest of my daughter. Go, and don't let grass grow under your feet!"

"No danger o' that!" Jimmy retorted. "The grass would git tuck sick, an' die o' cholera. But say, boss, afore I go, here's suthin' as mebbe will throw light onter whar Gracie is. De postmaster give it to me as I was comin' here, an' I forgot to chuck it to you before," and the lad held out a sealed envelope.

Gilbert hastily seized it, and glanced at the superscription. It was addressed to "Judge Gilbert, Cascade City," but bore no stamp.

"The postmaster said you'd have to pay for the stamp," observed Jimmy, "an' thet ef you didn't he'd sell you out!"

"Never mind what the postmaster said, but you hurry away and do exactly as I directed you to do. Be quick about it, too."

"Et won't take me more'n an hour to execoot sech a kermision," Jimmy retorted, as he turned and left the office.

When he was gone, Judge Gilbert opened the envelope, his face betraying great curiosity.

What he read evidently gave him great surprise, for he uttered an angry exclamation.

This was what his eyes beheld:

SKULL
AND
CROSSBONES.
THE FIRST BLOW
HAS BEEN STRUCK,
COFFIN.
BUT THE REPRISAL OF HATE
IS NOT ENDED.
BEWARE!

PRINCE PISTOL,
King of the West.

As he perused this singular message, the Mayor of Cascade grew deathly white, and staggered back, murmuring:

"My God! 'tis only too true. May Heaven have mercy upon me and my poor, unsinning child!"

Then the letter dropped from his nerveless grasp, and with a cry of agony he tottered backward, lost his balance, and went crashing to the floor in a swoon, and there lay white and silent as a corpse.

Had the second blow been struck, also?

CHAPTER II.

A CALL TO A DEATH-BED.

"WHOA, thar, Prudence Cordeliar, ye durned discomboberate Arabian war-hoss! Ef ye don't stop a-twistin' that tail o' yours, an' lookin' so consarned ugly, durn my cats ef I don't wallop ye within an inch o' yer life! Tell ye, stranger, when this aire lump o' mule-flesh gits her mad up, she makes things hum high-fangled tunes. Knew her once ter kick an Injun so fur that et tak him a week to get back to his lodge-kittle. Great ham-bone, but she's a 'arthquake, a volcanner an' a cyclone in herself, an' when ye come to add in myself, ther Great Annihilator, and Jeremiabher, the goat, we form the great Terrific Triangle!"

Away up in the mountains, two horsemen were picking their way slowly along through the intense darkness of a drizzling night.

One was mounted upon an ugly-looking mule, alongside of which trotted a decidedly rough and tough-looking billy-goat.

The old man in the saddle was, of course, the famous frontier veteran, Old Avalanche, who needs no introduction to the many readers of this Library.

His companion, mounted upon a splendid mettlesome horse, was a well-built young fellow of between twenty-five and thirty years, with a smooth, rather effeminate countenance, dark eyes and soft, dark-brown hair, that fell in a wave over his shoulders.

Except a slouch sombrero and top-boots, he was attired in a business garb, and was well armed with repeating-rifle and revolvers, as also was the Annihilator.

He answered to the name of Valentine Vassar,

and assumed that he was up in the mountains simply for pleasure and his health.

He and Old Avalanche had fallen in together, just at the end of evening, when a storm was impending, and the young man claiming to be unable to find a place of shelter for the night, Avalanche, with his accustomed spirit, had consented to take the stranger in tow, and together they would find some place to "hang up and dry."

"Don't know any more about this hyer range than I might, myself!" the Annihilator had allowed, "but et kinder strikes me we won't git left, fer ther Terrific Triangle seldom do."

But, the evening was now well advanced, and the rain came down in a steady drizzle, that was chilling and uncomfortable to man and beast.

"I don't see much prospect of finding any place of shelter to-night," Vassar growled, not heeding the veteran's reference to the virtues of the Terrific Triangle. "I am drenched to the skin!"

"Orter wear buckskin, as I do," Avalanche retorted, "an' then, you'd be all perkenskute. Hain't got er gigantic ideer we're liable to run slap dab ag'in' a French flat, myself. There orter be some sorter hoel we could snake into, not fur off, tho'. I've got er kind uv a sweet-scented ideer, that thar aire Injun cluss by, an' of thar be, they're most likely friendly, an' fer a few shekles, would entertain us like a couple o' double-breasted lords!"

"What reason have you to suspect the near presence of Indians?" Vassar inquired, curiously.

"Waal," Old Avalanche replied, after taking a chew of plug, "I've spent a good many years roamin' about, yer see, an' I've got a barometer what tells when red-skins ain't fur off. Great ham-bone, yes!"

"Well, I should like to know how, by the aid of a barometer, you could scent your approach to an Indian," Vassar declared. "The idea is simply preposterous, sir—absurd."

"Great ham-bone! no it ain't, stranger. My kinder barometer aire different from other kinds, and as unfailin' as freckles on the moon. D'y'e notis how Prudence Cordeliar, hyar, lays back her ears, wags her Arabian tail, an' tries ter make herself look as ugly as possible?"

"Well, what of that?"

"Why, great ham-bone, man alive, them ears and those tail constertoot my barometer. Prudence scents Injun!"

"Bosh! nonsense!"

"Not by er long shot. She smells red-skin, sure's there's a nose on yer face, an' ef we don't run plum plunk ag'in' an Injun afore the hour is over, I'll give yer a swig o' ther primest old mountain dew that ever wetted yer windpipe!"

"I'd prefer to sample the dew, now, and take the chances of finding the Indians, afterward!" Vassar observed with a shrug.

"Waal, I guess not!" replied Avalanche. "If I lose, the dew air yer's, but if I win, I keep it, myself. Why, I've known that aire same Prudence to smell Injun ten mile away, an' get so unmanageable 'cause she couldn't sail ahead an' kick up a fight that I hed to call in ther assistance o' Jeremiabher, to cool her down. She aire kinder 'fraid o' Jeremiabher, sence she see'd him butt in ther wall of an adobe hacienda tew git some bug-juice, an' you bet, when he says 'ba-a-a,' in thunder tones, ther muel becomes as docil as licked rooster!"

Vassar evidently valued the Annihilator's harangue with contempt, for he made no retort, and as he did not, Avalanche also subsided into silence.

They rode steadily on over a rugged mountain trail, which, for the most part, lay through a tract of scrub timber.

The rain continued to drizzle down, and a chilling breeze blew across the range—for the nocturnal voyageurs were traveling at a great altitude.

Suddenly a cry, a human cry it was, too, reached the keen hearing of the Annihilator, who immediately drew rein.

"Halt!" he said to Vassar. "Listen!"

"What's the matter now?" Vassar demanded.

"Do as I direct!" Alva ordered, tartly. "Halt! listen! I heard a cry!"

They did listen, and were rewarded.

"Come forward!" a voice cried—the voice of a woman. "Come quickly. Father is dying!"

"Great ham-bone!" muttered Old Avalanche.

"Come erlong, Vaseline. Suthin's up, sure. Hillo! thar; whar be ye, who calls?"

"Only a few yards from you. Come ahead, and you will see!" was the reply.

The two did ride forward and in a few seconds came to where a female figure was standing in

the doorway of a rude hut that was half-hidden among the pines.

The door was closed, but rays of light came from the crevice under the door.

The person in the door was evidently a maiden of some seventeen years, and was dressed in Indian costume.

Her face the two men could not plainly see.

"Who aire ye, an' what 'pears to be ther defickelty, ma'am?" the Annihilator demanded, as they drew rein.

"I am Sunshine, the daughter of Storm Cloud, the Seminole," was the reply. "My father is dying, and before he dies he wants to see some white man, to whom he can leave a trust. He sent me forth to see if by chance I could not find some pale-face, when I was overjoyed to hear you coming."

"Old Storm Cloud, eh?" echoed Avalanche, with a whistle of surprise. "The Injun Hermit!"

"My father is known as the Indian Hermit, sir."

"Richer than Croesus, too?"

"I cannot say as to that, sir. Will you come in?"

"Great ham-bone! I allow we will. You go in an' tell yer dad we have arriv' an' will be with him in three jerks of a lamb's tail, soon's we've pickereled out our prancin' Arabian steeds!"

Accordingly Sunshine re-entered the hut, while the Annihilator and Vassar dismounted, and proceeded to picket out their horses.

"Do you know this Storm Cloud?" Vassar inquired.

"I've heerd o' him," was the reply. "They say he's got more gold hoarded up and hidden away than would buy er railroad. I say, Vaseline, old boy, what d'y'e think o' Prudence Cordelier as er barometer, eh?" and the Annihilator chuckled gleefully.

"My name is Vassar, sir, not Vaseline!" the other retorted, angrily.

"Oh! well, yer needn't hump up about it; it's all ther same in Dutch or Choctaw. Come! we'll go in an' see the old Injun Hermit what's goin' to do er quickstep up ther golden stairs!"

And, advancing, the twain entered the hut!

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE EXPERIENCE.

THE hut of the Indian Hermit, was more cheery and homelike than the two visitors had expected to behold, on entering.

There was one large and one smaller apartment, the latter divided from the main by a curtain made of tanned skins, neatly sewed together and prettily ornamented with bead-work and silk.

The floor of the first room was covered with a matting of fur skins. There was a fire-place, near which hung cooking utensils. The other furniture consisted of a table, several stools, a rude settee, and a sort of swinging bed.

Light was afforded in plenty, by the bright log fire that burned upon the hearth.

Upon the cot bed, covered with a blanket, lay Storm Cloud, the Hermit Seminole, who for years, it was rumored, had kept aloof from his own or any other race of Indians.

As they approached the bed, the two visitors beheld a man of some fifty years, who, though his face was haggard, and eyes sunken, was as light-complexioned as themselves. Nor were his features molded like those of the Indian race.

Sunshine, who was preparing some herb medicine at the fire, was rather a *petite* but perfectly formed maiden, evidently past sixteen, with purely Anglo-Saxon features of exceeding beauty, dark dreamy eyes, and dark brown hair, becomingly arranged.

Her complexion was deep brunette, but not that swarthy hue which implied Indian birth and blood.

She was a veritable little Sylph even in her half-Indian costume, as sprightly and graceful in movement as a fawn and evidently as intelligent as she was pretty.

The eyes of Valentine Vassar, who was really a handsome fellow, himself, sparkled with pleasure as he beheld this spirit of the Hermit's hut.

Old Storm Cloud was partly bolstered up on pillows as the two men approached his bedside, and his keen black eyes surveyed them, critically and yet wistfully.

"Who are you?" he demanded, in a husky voice, but using good English.

"We are two travelers," spoke up Vassar, "whom your daughter called in, saying you wished to see some one before you died."

"So I do. I'm not long for this world. What names?"

"My name is Valentine Vassar. My companion is Old Avalanche, sometimes known as the Annihilator!"

Storm Cloud instantly fixed his piercing gaze searchingly upon the veteran scout, and frowned.

"He won't do!" he said, pointedly, "but you will, I guess. Tell him to go sit down."

Vassar turned inquiringly to the Annihilator, who nodded, and retired to a seat on the settee, wondering not a little what was to take place.

"I am soon to die!" Storm Cloud said, motioning Vassar to step closer to the bed. "I've struggled hard to live, but it's no use. I've got to give up and go, as all must go, sooner or later. Before I depart this life, I must settle my earthly accounts. I ought to have done it long ago.

"Now, before I make known to you what I want of you, are you willing to answer me a few questions?"

"Perfectly," Vassar said, seating himself at the bedside. "I am at your command, sir."

"It is well," the invalid assented, with evident satisfaction. "I am sure you are the man I want. You say your name is Vassar?"

"Valentine Vassar, sir?"

"Where do you live?"

"Nowhere, in particular. I came West to better my condition, and shall probably remain here, permanently.

"Have you always before lived in the East?"

"Always, until a month ago."

"How old are you?"

Vassar laughed.

"Well, to tell the truth, I am somewhat womanish about giving my age. Suffice to say that I look full as old as I am."

"Well, it don't matter much. You say you came West to better your condition—in other words, to make your fortune?"

"Well, yes, providing I might be so lucky."

"Would you be particularly scrupulous how you made it, as long as you did make it?"

"I don't know that I would. The world has not used me particularly well, and I owe it no favors."

"Good, you are my man. Would you carry out a revenge for me, for the sake of acquiring an immense fortune?"

"Certainly I would, if the pay was commensurate with the service required, Vassar replied, without hesitation. "Money's what I'm after and must have for any service."

"Ye're a scoundrel!" Old Avalanche muttered under his breath, and he looked vengefully at the young stranger.

"Very good!" Storm Cloud, said. "Sunshine bring me a drink."

Sunshine immediately obeyed, and after taking a copious draught, the old Hermit settled back among the pillows, with a sigh of relief.

"Now, listen," he went on, "and I will try and tell you all, before I get too weak. As perhaps you may have judged, I am not an Indian, but have as good blood in my veins, as you, if not better."

"I had formed just that opinion. But go on."

"Well, years ago, I wedded a maiden much my junior—a mere child, you might say. I was a promising young man, with a profession that brought me in a good living, and, like other young idiots, thought it would be the proper caper to have a wife. God only knows how often have I since repented the step I took."

"The girl I married was beneath me in station, and had no education, but she had rather a pretty face and winning ways, and I was blind to her other imperfections.

"I can truthfully say that I loved her, and always have loved her. Even after all the wrong and suffering I have endured, which has brought me to where you now behold me, my heart has never ceased to yearn for her. But, of course that is of no interest to you."

"The first years of our life, during which time two children were born, were comparatively happy; then, trouble began. My wife evinced a disposition to be home with her people two-thirds of the time, and finally induced me to go board with her parents. This didn't last long; soon she grew restless, and we had to go back to housekeeping. In less than six months we were back with her folks again. And thus it went, back and forth, first to boarding, then to housekeeping. We wouldn't more than get nicely settled in a new home when she'd run away home, and in order to be with her and my children, I'd have to break up and follow her."

Here Storm Cloud paused for another drink, after which he resumed:

"Well, the last time we went back to her mother's, I swore it should be the last. Her old hag of a mother continued to be meddlesome, and at last, rather than be driven crazy, I packed up a few things and left—left every thing dear to me, behind."

"But I must tell you the rest briefly. I was arrested for desertion, and sent to jail for six months. When my time was up I was rear rested and sent back six more. When this term was up, I would have been sent back for another six, only that I was too quick for them—escaped, and fled the State. Later I ventured back, found this child playing in the street, stole her away and fled. The sheriff chased me, but never found me."

"With Sunshine I came here, and established myself as Storm Cloud, the Seminole."

"The rest is easy told. While I was in jail, my wife took up with and actually married a gambler, who, I learned, had been the direct cause of the breaking up of my home. The marriage, of course, could not have been legal, as she had not been divorced.

"He prospered and they drifted West, and settled not many miles from here, by a singular chance."

"I could have stolen my other child, but did not want her. She was too like her mother. Finally the mother disappeared. I do not know what became of her, but I always suspected that her husband put her out of the way."

"Now I come to the last of my story. In all the years I have been a hermit I have been amassing wealth, until I have a large fortune. No one but myself and one other knows how large, or where it is."

"Half of this fortune belongs to my daughter, Sunshine. The other half will be paid to the man who carries out my commands and executes my revenge."

The eyes of Valentine Vassar sparkled.

"And this revenge," he said—"in what does it consist?"

"Listen. The man who ruined my home is rich and influential, and I honestly believe he loves my child as much as if she were his own. It would be a sore blow for him to lose her—the first part of the revenge, therefore, will be to tear the girl away from him and place her forever beyond his reach, but where not the least harm can come to her."

"Your second work will be to reduce the man to beggary, so that he will be deserted by every friend he has in this region."

"Your third act will be then to visit him, rehearse to him all I have told you, and apprise him that it was the vengeance of Willard Winslow. Then kill him! When he is dead, give my daughter her liberty, reunite her to her sister here, and let her know their existing relationship. When you have done this you will receive from Sunshine here one-half of the fortune I have left behind."

"Fail in any one point, and you get not a farthing!"

"What surely have I that I will get this reward, after I have carried out the injunction?" Vassar asked. "Women are mighty uncertain you know."

"Never fear. Sunshine has sworn to pay when my wishes have been executed. But, you are to understand that you are in no way to molest her, and any ill-treatment to the other daughter will forfeit all your claims. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly!"

"And do you for the consideration I have named, solemnly swear by your God, and hope of forgiveness in the hereafter, to faithfully execute the vendetta I have directed?"

Valentine Vassar arose to his feet, and holding his right hand aloft, he cried, in a firm tone:

"I swear!"

"It is well. The compact is sealed. Now bend your ear close, and I will name your man!"

Vassar obeyed; an instant later, nodded.

"Very well!" he assented.

"Now, I want you to remain here, until I am dead, so as to assist in my burial," Storm Cloud said. "As for the old man, yonder, order him away. He is not welcome!"

"Great rip-snortin' ham-bone. Ye needn't take *that* trouble!" Avalanche cried, springing to his feet. "I wouldn't be hyer when you kick the bucket, ye old cuss, fer all ther gold in the Rockies, 'ca'se the devil will be sure to be present ter claim ye, an' I ain't hankerin' ter shake hands wi' him, yet awhile!"

And opening the door, he let himself out into the night, with its drizzling rain, and piercing wind!

CHAPTER IV.

OLD AVALANCHE ON THE DICKER.

WHEN Judge Justin Gilbert aroused to consciousness, he found himself in bed, in his own house.

The lamp was lit, and three persons were seated at his bedside—his housekeeper, Mrs. Blum; a strange, heavy bearded man, whom he recognized as the sheriff of that district, one Hopkins by name; and his errand boy, Jimmy Junebug.

"Thar, he ain't dead, after all! I know'd he was better than a dozen stiffs!" Jimmy cried, as the judge opened his eyes, and sat bolt upright.

"My dear sir, we were afraid you had given up the ghost," the sheriff remarked. "You've lain like a corpse, for thirty-six hours!"

"Like a corpse?" the judge echoed, passing his hand over his forehead, as if his wits were at fault. "What has been the matter with me?"

"Why, we found you lying in your office, like a dead man, and you have lain in a trance like a swoon, ever since."

"I remember, I fainted," the judge responded, with a slight shudder, and he suddenly regained his memory, and his mind went back to the letter he had received from Prince Pistol. "The shock at the loss of my child did it. Have you found her, sheriff?"

"Alas! no, judge, I am sorry to say we haven't. I happened in town about the time the alarm was given and took personal charge of the search that has been made. We have scoured every foot of the country in every direction, for miles around, without finding the least clew, and at last, exhausted and discouraged, have been forced to abandon the search!"

"Did you find a letter on the floor of my office when you found me?"

"Ay, and read it. But if there is such an outlaw in these parts as Prince Pistol, he is a new-comer, and has never made himself known before. Do you think your daughter is in his power?"

"Would not his letter signify so? It said—'this is the first blow!'"

"Very true. But, have you no idea who this Prince Pistol is? Have you not in view some enemy who might seek to injure you?"

"I do not know that I have an enemy in the whole world!"

Then the matter is certainly enveloped in impenetrable mystery!" the sheriff declared, "for surely, be she living or dead, your daughter is not within a radius of ten miles from here!"

"Well, she shall be found, if I have to expend every cent I have in the world!" the judge announced, with a fire of determination. "Please leave the room, now, while I rise and dress, and I will join you in the parlor, directly. What time is it?"

"Seven in the evening. But are you strong enough to rise, judge?"

"Ay! I feel as strong as a young bull. I'll join you in a few minutes."

"Well, when you come down, boss," spoke up Jimmy Junebug, "you'll find a queer methuselah in the parlor, w'at's been there all day, waitin' for you to come to."

"Who is he, and what does he want?"

"Dunno! He see he's an avalanche, an annihilator, an' a triangle, an' all that sort o' biz, an' wants to see you on 'portant bizness."

"We tried ter induce him ter take a walk for the benefit o' his health, but he allowed ef we teched him he'd shute yer house so full o' holes ye could sift pertaters thru et. Gosh! down in New York, sech a feller'd make a fortune on the stage!"

"I'll soon see who he is!" the judge said with a scowl, and then the others left the room.

The judge was not long in making his toilet, after which he descended to the parlor, where he found, in addition to the sheriff and Jimmy Junebug, (who made himself as much to home as though a priveleged member of the family) our veteran friend, Old Avalanche.

The scout was seated complacently in the easiest chair in the room, and evidently enjoying himself quite handsomely.

"Well, sir, who are you?" the judge demanded, advancing toward him, with a frown, "and what's your business?"

Avalanche arose instantly.

"If it pleases yer mighty highness," he answered, "I aire Old Avalanche, ther Great Injun Annihilator, and ther third rib o' ther Terrific Triangle, which same consarn aire a double-distilled decoction of devastation and demoralization. P'raps ye may have heerd o' me?"

"No! I never heard of you. What do you want here?"

"I want ter see about my pard!"
"Who's yer pard? What do I know about him?"

"Yer orter know su'thin', when ye've got him locked up in yer jail. His name is Dick Bristol, but more oftener he's called Deadwood Dick, Junior. That's ther percise chap I came to see erbout, by ther great antediluvian ham-bone!"

"So that rascal iz yer pard, eh?"

"No, that rascal ain't my pard, but that gentleman aire, an' a squarer and whiter feller never straddled a hoss, you bet!"

"Well, sir, he'll not be apt to straddle a horse very soon, again!"

"An' why not, cunnel? What's Dick did, that ye've got him locked up? If you'd be so kind, I'd like ter hear ther full perticklers, fer Dickey an' I have mated together a good while, an' I never know'd him ter do a crooked thing," and the Annihilator brushed a tear from his eye, and his voice was husky.

Gilbert surveyed him, keenly, and then seated himself.

"Well, I will tell you, since you seem to think so much of the fellow," he rejoined. "A week ago, Mr. Fowler, one of our leading citizens, went for a ride, up the gulch. Not returning at the proper time, a party was sent out to investigate. They found his body over in Bear canyon. He was dead—had been shot through the heart, and robbed of a large sum of money. His horse could nowhere be found.

"A search was made, however, and about thirty miles from the scene of the murder, this Richard Bristol was found. He not only had Fowler's horse in his possession, but also a large sum of money—the same amount, about, that Fowler had been robbed of.

"The circumstances were so suspicious that he was arrested, brought before me, and given a trial, and was sentenced. He will be hung, day after to-morrow, at ten o'clock, providing a mob don't take him out of jail, and lynch him before the day of his execution arrives. That's all, sir!"

"Well, I reckon et ain't, boss," Avalanche declared, sternly. "I've got a few eperdemic remarks ter make afore I mazourky off. Ye convicted Dickey on purely sarcumstanshal evidence, didn't ye?"

"Well, you can call it that if you please. That is your way of thinking. I was judge, believed him guilty, and sentenced him. So that's all there is of it!"

"Waal, et ain't, by er long shot. Ther hoss war found in Dickey's persession, an' thes fac' coupled wi' that that you allowed had a boodle o' money wi' him—jes' fer that you allowed he'd better swing! Waal! waal! by ther great antediluvian ham-bone. Ef that don't dog the cat! What did Dickey say, when he war catched wi' ther hoss in his persession?"

"Oh! he said he found it wandering in the mountains and thought he'd keep it with him until he could find some owner. Of course, it would be natural for him to say that, to shield himself. So there's no use of talking any more about it. He is guilty of both robbery and murder, and must pay the penalty. You'd better be going, old gent!"

"By ther smokin' St. Peter, I won't go till I get ready, an' thar ain't enough o' ye to make me go!" Avalanche declared, indignantly. "I tell ye, Dickey sha'n't hang, an' I've a mule an' a goat ter prove et. I'll bu'st ther Terrific Triangle ter thunder, afore he shall hang, you bet. Ther Government won't allow ye ter hang him! Thar! now!"

"What has the Government to say about the matter?" Gilbert asked, curiously, and a trifle uneasily.

"Oh! you'll find out, ef ye don't see him free. I want yer ter know that Dick Bristol aire a Government detective, and has got the papers to show for it. He's bu'sted up more outlawry in different parts o' the West, in the last year or two, than any dozen other detectives, an' I've helped him, several times. Tork erbout Deadwood Dickey bein' a murderer an' a thief!—why I've a notion ter set the hull triangle in motion an' clean out the crowd o' you!"

"He claimed he was a detective at the trial," the judge said, addressing the sheriff, "but I didn't take any stock in it!" Then, turning to Avalanche: "If he is a Government detective, where's his papers?"

"I've got 'em, myself. He give them to me, for safe keepin'. fearin' he'd lose 'em. We trav'el tergether party much, an' he know'd he could get 'em most any time he wanted 'em."

"Let's see them!"

The papers were produced, and examined by both the judge and the sheriff, after which they were returned to the Annihilator.

"The papers appear all right," the judge admitted, "but I cannot assume the responsibility of releasing the fellow on their account."

"Judge," spoke up the sheriff, "if this Bristol is smart enough in his line of business to win Government favors, he would be a good man to put on your case, I should think!"

"Yas, ef ther judge hev a case that Dickey and I can't figger out, I'll sell out cheap, and bu'st up ther triangle forever—so help me, by ther hoary-headed ham-bone! Dickey ner me never lost a case yet!" Avalanche most decisively asserted.

"I have lost a daughter. Do you think you could find her?" the judge asked, with a sarcastic smile.

Avalanche started, whistled, and looked hard at the Mayor of Cascade City.

"Lost a daughter, eh? Since when?"

"A couple of days ago."

"How did ye lose her?"

"That is more than I can tell. She mysteriously disappeared from her room during the night, and although an extended search has been made, no trace can be found of her."

The Annihilator gave the judge a penetrating glance with his keen little eyes.

"Was she your daughter?" he asked.

"Why, certainly," replied the judge, flushing a trifle. "Whose else's daughter would she be?"

"I did not know but what she might have been your wife's, you know!"

Gilbert looked puzzled.

"What are you driving at?" he demanded.

"Oh! nothin' much. I've got another question to ax ye, afore I can tell ye whether we could do anything for you or not. Did yer ever know a man called Willard Winslow?"

Judge Gilbert started violently, turned deathly pale, and sprung excitedly to his feet.

"What do you know about Willard Winslow?" he hoarsely demanded, taking a step toward the veteran. "Speak! quick, or I'll throttle you!"

"Nary throttle!" Avalanche coolly replied, poking a six-shooter in front of his judgeship's nose, with a suddenness that caused him to retreat. "Ef that's any throttlin' to be done around this shebang, I'll do that same myself, by gum! So now, go back to yer cheer an' squat, or by the great horned frog o' Hong Kong, I'll fill ye so full o' perforations that you'll answer fer a water-filter. Git!"

And the judge did git, but not without a growl of disgust.

"Now then, that's right," Avalanche commented, as the judge seated himself. "Yer actin' sensible now. Thar ain't no 'tarnal use uv an ordinary man buckin' ag'in' a ragin' whirlwind o' demolition like ther third consecutive part of ther Terrific Triangle, which same aire myself."

"What do you know of Willard Winslow?" the judge repeated, white with passion. "Out with it!"

"Mebbe yer wouldn't like ter have me tell jest all I know, right afore yer company hyer," Avalanche retorted with a grin, "an' then again, I may know a purty good deal about you thet ye wouldn't like to hev made public!"

Gilbert winced.

"So we'll let *that* subjeck drap," Avalanche continued. "Ef you want yer gal back, why, just release my partner from jail, an' we'll hev yer gal back to ye in s'prisin' short time!"

"If you know where she is, I can force you to tell me," the judge said, sternly.

Avalanche snorted.

"So could ye force buckwheat cakes out of a telegraff pole," he retorted. "Nary force about this hyer eperdemic, nary time! Thar ain't enuff steam-power in seven States to force a secret out o' yer humble sarvent, lessen he wants ter elucidate. Ef ye want ter dicker wi' ther Great Annihilator, you've got to release his pard, Dickey. No Dickey, no dicker."

Judge Gilbert turned despairingly to Sheriff Hopkins.

"Hopkins, what do you think about the matter?" he asked in despair.

"Well, judge, I would not like to advise, but I know what I should do if it were my case."

"You'd set the fellow at liberty?"

"I should, providing he and this old chap will take charge of your case and try to find your daughter."

"But the populace—what would they say? They would be wild; they'd raise a riot. They're bent on seeing the fellow hung, and even if he were set at liberty, they'd string him up without mercy."

"The fellow must leave town to carry out his mission, so escape could easily be arranged. If caught afterward it would be his own lookout."

"But would he take hold of the job?"

"I'll vouch for that," Old Avalanche declared. "Dickey and I will do the thing up brown, ef I says so."

"But who's going to take the responsibility of releasing him from jail?" the judge demanded. "I don't want to show my hand."

"That is not necessary," Hopkins assured. "I have a private key to the jail."

"And do you think you can release the prisoner, and bring him here without discovery?"

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"Then go at once," the judge cried, excitedly. "I will have my daughter back at all hazards. Go, and lose not a moment's time!"

CHAPTER V.

THE EYE AND THE TOOTH.

SHERIFF HOPKINS accordingly took his departure, and when he had gone, Judge Gilbert turned to young Junebug, who was taking a world of comfort in one of the easy-chairs.

"Jimmy, you can run down to the post-office and see if there is any mail for me, and you need not hurry back, as I wish to have a word in private with this gentleman."

James arose and left the room, looking and feeling rather crestfallen.

He had been an attentive listener to the conversation; his boyish curiosity had been aroused; and what is more potent than boyish curiosity?

He would have given a deal to have overheard what transpired between the judge and the Annihilator; but as it was bread and butter for him to obey, and a discharge to disobey, he concluded that it would be his wisest course to hold fast to the bread and butter; so he took his way leisurely to the post-office.

When the boy left the house, the judge turned his attention to Old Avalanche.

"Now look here, my friend," he said; "I want to know just who and what you are?"

"Great snortin' Spartacus! Hevn't I told you who I was? What in thunderation more d'ye want?"

"You haven't told me *what* you are, however."

"Oh, hevn't I? Well, I'm a sort of a cross between ther Darwinian Gyasticuticus and a Cochin China idol. Ther' may be a little grizzly bear an' buckin' turro mixed, but I'll swear ther' ain't no coyote ner turkey buzzard. If—"

"Nonsense! What calling do you follow for a livelihood?"

"Well, as ther hangman sed to the stiff, that depends. Most generally when I'm near where there is a howtel, I follers ther calling o' ther dinner-bell. When I ain't, I hunt, trap, prospect, shoot, scalp, eat, sleep and raise a devastatin' blizzard o' demolition!"

"Enough of that blarney. Answer my questions fairly and squarely, or it will be the worse for you and your friend, too!" Gilbert cried, now thoroughly angered. "Are you aware that I am judge of this town?"

"Waal, I sh'd judge that ye war," was the reply, given with imperturbable gravity.

"Answer my questions without any more of your funny business, or Deadwood Dick shall hang without any of my interference!" Gilbert cried, furiously.

"Waal, go ahead."

"Are you a detective?"

"I reckon I'm a sorter one."

"How did you ever learn the name of Willard Winslow?"

"By seein' the chap hisself."

"Where?"

"Oh, 'way up in ther mountings."

"What was he doing?"

"Croakin'!"

"What?"

"Kickin' the bucket."

"Ah! Did he say anything about me to you?"

"Not to me."

"To whom, then?"

"A chap who called hisself Valentine Vassar. He told ther hull story o' how you broke up his home, stole his wife away, an' wrecked his life!"

"It's false!" Gilbert cried, fiercely.

"Don't ye call me a liar, or I'll scalp ye!" and Avalanche whipped a knife from his belt and sprung suddenly to his feet. "By ther great ham-bone that played base-ball wi' old Joner, no!"

"Stop! stop!" the judge exclaimed, now thoroughly alarmed. "I didn't mean that what you said was false; I meant that it was false that I ever stole any man's wife, much less Willard Winslow's. Why did he tell all this to the man called Valentine Vassar?"

"Waal, it appears there's a vendetta against you, created by this Winslow and to be executed by Vassar. Winslow leaves behind a big fortune, an' when Vassar carries out the vendetta to the end he's ter have half the fortin'. Leastwise, that's how I understood it. First, this Vassar aire to steal away yer gal an' secrete her beyond yer reach; then, he's to scheme to ruin ye and get away yer fortin'; an' lastly, he is to tell ye who set him on to do it, and then, kill ye outright, after which half the fortin' is his. Oh! it's all cut and dried, an' yer name aire sooner or later, D-e-n-den-n-i-s-nis-Dennis!"

Judge Gilbert had grown very pale, and a tremor ran over his figure.

"Great God! this is fearful. Am I, who never harmed anybody, to be made the victim of such a diabolical scheme as this? Verily, Willard Winslow, you cannot rest easy in your grave. Tell me, scout, when, where and how you came to learn all this?"

Avalanche obeyed by narrating the circumstances of his adventure on the mountain about a week before.

The judge listened with rapt attention.

"Then, you are not sure that Winslow really died?" he asked.

"Well, no—not positively, perzackly, though I allow et wouldn't pay to bet he didn't die."

"Do you think you could find that hut again?"

"Dunno, fer sart'in. Et war powerful dark, that night, an' I couldn't tell head or tail which away I was going; I allow, however, I might find et after some search."

At this juncture Jimmy Junebug entered, and that put a stop to further conversation.

"This war in the post-offis, guv'nor," he said, handing the judge a paste-board box about three inches square by one in thickness.

"Very well, Jimmy. You can run out now, and see if the housekeeper don't want something of you."

Jimmy left the room as directed, but not without some reluctance.

"Bet a bat ef them two fellers go searchin' fer Miss Gracie, I'm one o' the party. I wasn't never born to be a lackey fer no one, an' et goes ag'in' the grain. Ef I kin only hook on to some weapons, somehow, I'm goin' erlong. Reckon I'll let the housekeeper go to blazes, while I go foragin' fer shootin'-irons." And, instead of seeking the domestic quarters, he put on his hat and left the house.

The box Judge Gilbert had received from Jimmy was directed to "Justin Gilbert."

Not without manifest eagerness did he remove the cord wrapped around it, Old Avalanche watching him narrowly.

It was evident the keen-eyed old Annihilator had not the greatest amount of confidence in this rotund Mayor of Cascade City.

After removing the twine, Judge Gilbert raised the lid.

Then, there pealed from his lips such a yell of horror, as to bring Old Avalanche in a twinkling to his side.

What the Annihilator saw caused him also to give utterance to an exclamation of surprise.

In the bottom of the box was a small piece of ordinary card-board, and affixed to this, glassy, staring and horrible to look at, was a *human eye*, while near it was a large double-pronged tooth, also belonging to a human being.

The eye had evidently only recently been removed from its socket, being covered only by a film.

And truly appalling sight the two things were!

Written just below the eye, on the card, was the suggestive legend:

"An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth!"

Little wonder Justin Gilbert sat staring at the ominous present, nearly frozen with terror.

Even Old Avalanche, who, in his eventful career, had passed through many strange experiences—ay! terrible experiences—could not help shuddering.

He was the first to break the silence.

"Great ham-bone that paralyzed the larynx of old Joner! Ef that ain't a red-hot Christmas present, then I don't kno'. Lordy Limerick! Ef I war ter get sech an omen as that, I'd go straight off an' hev my tailor make me a funeral suit, by gum! Jedge, et looks kinder like that war another piece o' vendetta bizness, hey?"

Gilbert nodded assent.

He was as pale as death, and trembling like a leaf.

"Yes!" he said, huskily, "it was undoubtedly sent with a view of torturing me. My God! what have I ever done, to merit this?"

"Waal! I allow ye orter know that, best, yourself, boss. Et do appear that ye must ha' sometime did somethin' ter stir up this appetite fer revenge ag'in' ye!"

"No! no! never! I have never injured any one. Avalanche, it is evident what you have told me is true. A vendetta has been inspired against me, and they intend to drag me down to death, by inches. See here! I am rich, and able to pay you well. Money is no object to me, compared with life. Hunt down this Valentine Vassar, and kill him, and I'll give you five thousand dollars!"

"Waal, et may be he kin be hunted down, jedge, but ef thar's any killin' ter be did, you'll have to do that, yerself. I ain't takin' on any jobs like that fer money. Ef I hed a grudge ag'in' a feller, 'nuff ter kill him, I'd most likely make him think a hailstarm o' demolition hed struck him, but when et comes ter killin' fer wages, ther third rib o' ther Terrific Triangle ain't thar!"

"Then, capture the accursed scoundrel, and I'll take the responsibility of killin' him myself!"

"Well, wait till Dickey arrives, an' we'll see erbout it. Ah! I opine heer they come, now!"

True enough, footsteps were heard in the hall, and, a moment later, Sheriff Hopkins entered the parlor, accompanied by the young Prince of Western sleuths, Dick Bristol, or Deadwood Dick, Jr.

No perceptible change has been wrought in the young man, since last we met him. He is the same sturdy, handsome, dashing young fellow, with flashing eyes, and waving hair; strong-limbed and agile, and brave and fearless as a lion.

Imprisonment has taken none of the healthful glow from his cheeks.

With firm step, and erect carriage he follows the sheriff into the room. He shows no awe, no confusion at being conducted into the presence of the man who had sentenced him to death. Rather there is an expression upon his smooth, handsome face that seems to say:

"Sir, I have come. Say what you have to say, but remember I crave no odds of you!"

His wrists are confined by the bracelets of the law, but he does not appear to mind them in the least.

Old Avalanche sprung forward with a cry of joy, as he saw his pard, and seized him by the manacled hands.

"Dicky, old boy, I'm glad to see yer," almost tearfully cried the Annihilator, "by the great ham-bone I am, but sorry ter see a chap o' yer caliber dishonored by sech things as handcuffs. But don't fret. Ther Terrific Triangle aire still extant, an' they won't allow that precious neck o' yours to be stretched, an' don't you fergit et!"

Then, in an undertone, he added:

"Accept the terms offered you!"

Dick nodded, and turned his attention to the judge, who was conversing with Hopkins.

A moment later, Gilbert approached.

"Young man," he said, "are you aware why you have been taken from jail, and brought here?"

"Can't say I have the least idea," Dick replied, coolly. "I presume there is an object behind it."

"Well, there is. But for me, sir, you would perish upon the gallows, a fate at which the bravest men shrink!"

"I have faced death a dozen times, and never flinched yet," was the retort.

"Then, truly, you are braver than most men. I have had you released from prison, and brought here, to give you liberty. In doing this, both the sheriff and myself are running great personal risks, for, did the people of Cascade City know that we were concerned in liberating you, they would string us up, without mercy!"

"Well," Dick replied, "I am not aware that I have as yet cried for quarter. You sentenced me to death, and I accepted the conviction without a murmur."

"Very true. I'll give you credit for that. But, your liberation is not unconditional!"

"Oh! it is not?"

"Of course not. There is something you will have to do, in order to secure your release—that is, something you will have to promise to do."

"Well, go ahead. You are the orator—I the audience!"

"Humph! you're cool about it!"

"No use of getting overheated, as I see; besides, you know, I just came out of the cooler," was the reply.

"Very good—extremely good. But, to business. What I have to say is this: your friend here, has proven to my satisfaction that you are a detective of more than ordinary

ability. I am in need of such a man, to take charge of a case. My daughter has been stolen from me by an enemy who has his stronghold in or about this town and vicinity. If you will promise to restore her to me, I will guarantee you your liberty!"

"Before making any rash promises I should prefer to have a private conference with Avalanche," was Dick's unsatisfactory answer.

CHAPTER VI.

READY FOR BUSINESS.

JUSTIN GILBERT eyed Deadwood Dick, Junior, half-angrily, half-admiringly.

A man of good judgment, he plainly saw that Dick, though a prisoner and under death-sentence, was no boy to deal with, but one whose will was like steel, and therefore the very person to enlist in the search for lost Gracie.

So his answer to Dick's suggestion was:

"Very well, Hopkins and I will retire and give you and Avalanche the parlor to yourselves for half an hour, trusting of course you are gentlemen enough not to attempt to escape."

"You need have no fears on that score," Dick replied quietly. "You will find me here when you return."

Accordingly, the judge and Hopkins sought another room and opened a bottle of wine.

"That fellow is a cool cuss!" the judge observed.

"You can stake your life he is," Hopkins replied, "and as nervy as he is cool. He's just the chap you want to work up your case, and to look into this vendetta business."

"So I think. But it struck me that he was not quite disposed to have anything to do with it."

"Oh! he'll take hold of it fast enough, without a doubt. He wanted to confer with his friend, to find out what he could, before he made any positive promise."

"Perhaps if I would tender him a sum of money, it would be an incentive?"

"Don't you do it. Don't you do it," the sheriff said advisedly. "I can read that fellow, evidently, better than you. While it is not improbable that he will undertake the job for his liberation, he is one of those fellows who would scorn to take your money. There's too much independence in him for that."

Promptly when half an hour was up, there was a rap on the parlor door, announcing the termination of the conference between the two parts.

The judge and Hopkins accordingly re-entered the parlor.

"Mr. Gilbert," Dick said, "Avalanche and I have had a consultation, and have but little doubt but what we can recover your daughter. But, before I promise you to devote my attention to the case, in event of my release, I must have a private interview with you. There are a few points I must fully understand as preliminary to my final decision."

"Very well, sir, the interview shall be granted. Avalanche, you and the sheriff can go out this time. You will find some good wine in the closet in the dining-room. First, however, sheriff, remove those bracelets from Bristol's wrists. I have no fear that he will try to escape."

The handcuffs were accordingly removed; then the Annihilator and the sheriff retired.

When Dick and the judge were seated, the former said:

"Now, Mr. Gilbert, as I said, I do not doubt but what we can recover your daughter and restore her to you. As a team, Avalanche and I work well together, and seldom fail. We must, however, know just what lies behind all this trouble, and if I ask you some very personal questions I hope you will have no hesitation in answering them. If you wish me to work entirely for your best interests you must make me your confidant. Whatever you confide to me of course, is kept in sacred confidence."

"Now, Avalanche has been telling me about this adventure of his on the mountain, and all he learned there, and about the vendetta being placed against you by this Storm Cloud, otherwise Willard Winslow, to be executed by a man—a chance acquaintance Avalanche had made—who called himself Valentine Vassar. Do you know this Vassar?"

"No; haven't the slightest idea who or what he is."

"Avalanche suspects that your daughter has fallen into this man's hands, according to the terms of the vendetta. Do you?"

"That seems to be the most reasonable theory I can form, sir."

"Avalanche also tells me you deny the state-

ment Winslow made concerning family affairs; that is, in regard to your estranging his wife's affections, and afterward living with her?"

"I do most emphatically deny it; it is wickedly false."

"Yet you turned pale when you heard Winslow's name mentioned, and grew furious? You, accordingly, if Winslow's story is incorrect, must have a secret. Am I not right?"

"Well, perhaps."

"I thought so. Now, another thing: Is or is not the girl who has been stolen from you *your own flesh and blood?*"

"She is my daughter. I am her real father."

"And the girl at Storm Cloud's hut?"

"Is her sister."

"Her own sister?"

"Her half-sister."

"Ah!" and Dick gazed down at the carpet, reflectively.

Then he went on:

"Avalanche tells me that some thirty-six or forty hours ago, while in your office, you received a mysterious letter, signed 'Prince Pistol, King of the West,' and that, on reading it, you fainted dead away, only recovering consciousness a short time ago. The contents of the letter were to the effect that the first blow had been struck, and warned you to beware of the second!"

Gilbert bit his nether lip and scowled.

"Where did your friend acquire so much information?" he demanded.

"Why, he heard it about town. Half a dozen read the letter before your friend, the sheriff, got hold of it, and it is now the gossip of the place. Now, Mr. Gilbert, you must have had strong reason for fainting over that letter. You must know this Prince Pistol, as he signs himself?"

"Well, what if I do? That has nothing to do with the case I have given you to attend to."

"Maybe not; maybe yes. It's this way with me: I want to know what I am working at. There's a mystery back of all this which must be revealed before I undertake the job. It involves not only you, but the two girls, Willard Winslow, Valentine Vassar, and Prince Pistol. In recovering the one you call your daughter, and restoring her to you, I might be doing some one else a great injury."

"Nonsense! Gracie is my own flesh and blood. What my secret is I must decline to tell you. It has no connection whatever with your rescuing my daughter."

"You know who this Prince Pistol is?"

"I do not know, but I perhaps might suspect. Yet I am not at liberty to give away my suspicion."

"Do you think Prince Pistol and Valentine Vassar are one and the same person?"

"Candidly, I do not know what to think. They may be, or they may not be. However, I will tell you what I'll do: If, while searching for my daughter, you can capture either one or both of the men, as the case may be, and send for me and turn them over into my custody, it will be worth five thousand dollars apiece to you and your partner. Now, that's all."

"Which is equivalent to saying I can take the case as it is, or let it alone?"

"Exactly."

"Very well. I will take the case as it is. But how am I to know your daughter? What sort of a looking girl is she?"

"I will give you her picture. Here it is. She is eighteen years of age, fair complexioned, with light brown hair and hazel eyes."

"Very well. As it appears I have got about all the information I can now obtain, I reckon I and Avalanche better adjourn to a place of safety, and arrange our plans."

"Wait! Before you go let me return you the money that was taken from you at the time of your arrest. I have no longer a doubt but what it properly belongs to you."

"Thank you. It will certainly come in handy."

"And if you will step into the adjoining room you are free to select from my excellent stock such weapons as you may need. I always have a good supply, accumulated by loans of money. Let me advise you, however, to look out for yourself. If you are caught again by the people it will go hard with you."

"Never fear. I'll not let 'em nab me again. I can meet you on the street, to-morrow, and you wouldn't know me."

"In disguise?"

"Certainly."

"That reminds me. Prince Pistol's notice, and another warning I have received, leads me to believe that the chap is not located far from here; indeed, he may be in the town now."

Dick thoroughly armed himself, and soon after he and Old Avalanche took their departure.

"If I don't unravel this mystery, I'll chaw my own ear off!" was Dick's unspoken resolve.

CHAPTER VII.

VASSAR SHOWS HIS CLOVEN HOOF.

LET US now go back to the mountain hut on the night which opened our story.

Not long after the departure of Old Avalanche Storm Cloud died.

Valentine Vassar and Sunshine watched by the bedside, until the last, and when life had become extinct, Vassar gently closed the eyes of the hermit, and folded his arms across his breast.

When all was over Sunshine simply gave a long-drawn sigh—more of relief than of grief—and turned away from the death-bed.

Vassar gazed after her, with something like a smile flitting over his face as he seated himself before the ruddy fire upon the hearth, into whose depths Sunshine now stood silently gazing.

"Well, it's all over," he remarked, by way of drawing her into conversation.

"Yes, all over," was the brief reply, "all except the burial to-morrow."

"And unless I am mistaken, miss, you are not extremely sorry?"

"Well, no, I am not. I have always been kept penned up here, away from other people. I have longed for friends and associates, but they have been denied me, for Storm Cloud well earned the name—he ruled with an inflexible will. Therefore it can scarcely be wondered at that I am not sorry it is all over, and I am free to go whither I will."

"I presume you will remain here, until the vendetta is carried out?" Vassar interrogated.

"Possibly—possibly not. I may go down to Cascade City, where are those of my own sex. I have no interest in the vendetta, whatever, more than to pay over the money when the work is done."

"You had better give up your idea of going to Cascade City!"

"And why so?"

"For a very good reason. That old skinflint of a scout will most likely head for the town, and when it was found out that you were Storm Cloud's daughter, you would find your reception anything but gratifying, I can assure you."

Sunshine looked thoughtful. There was wisdom in Vassar's advice. That she would be looked upon with suspicion, even if she was not given serious trouble, was quite likely to happen.

"Instead of going to Cascade City," Vassar continued, "you had best accompany me!"

"Accompany you, sir!"

"Even so. Storm Cloud did not die knowing me in my true character. Instead of being Vassar, an Eastern gentleman, I am Prince Pistol, King of the West, or, in other words, a road-agent. Not many miles from here, I have an invulnerable stronghold, where you can have all the comforts of a home, and, in due time the companionship of your sister, Grace. I have a dozen men to guard my rendezvous, and therefore you would have both comfort and safety!"

Sunshine watched him in great amazement as he spoke.

"And so you are a robber?" she repeated.

"Oh, no," was the cool reply, "simply a gentleman road-agent, who preys upon the rich, and relieves the poor in distress. Prince Pistol is not the man to take a farthing from a poor person; on the contrary, it is the rich whom I seek to despoil of their hoards. If you will accept the protection and hospitality of my camp, we will go to-morrow, after burying your father."

"No! no!" Sunshine hastened to say, "I cannot go. I will stay here at the hut until my sister is restored to me, and then we will go East, and live in peace and quiet."

"But I say you *must* go!" Vassar—or Prince Pistol, as we shall afterward know him—firmly declared. "I could not think of allowing you to remain here, alone and unprotected. You must accompany me!"

"But I will *not* go!" Sunshine cried, stamping her foot impetuously, while her eyes flashed. "I am no coward, and not afraid to remain here. I can defend myself better than most men, either with rifle, revolver or bowie. So I shall remain here!"

Prince Pistol made no response, but decided:

"We shall see about it, my pretty fairy. The King of the West may have a word to say about that."

The night passed with only now and then a word being spoken, and at last day dawned, clear and bright, leaving no trace of the previous night's storm, except the rain-drops clinging to the foliage.

And daylight came most welcome to the watchers of the dead.

Some hewn-out planks were found about the premises, and while Sunshine prepared the morning meal, Vassar set to work at fashioning a rude coffin, which rude though it was, answered the purpose.

After breakfast a grave was dug near the hut, Sunshine lending a helping hand; then the remains of the deceased Hermit were placed in the box, the box in the grave, and all that was earthly of Storm Cloud was covered forever from view.

Kneeling a few minutes in silent prayer by the grave, Sunshine then arose and Prince Pistol said:

"Well, my strange adventure has ended so far as the present is concerned, and I must return to my camp. Now, Sunshine, I am your friend, as I will prove to you, and I want you to accompany me to my retreat, where everything will be done to make it pleasant for you!"

"I must decline, sir," Sunshine declared, firmly. "I shall remain here, for a time, at least."

"But, listen to reason; I expect to have your sister in my power in a few days, and surely, you will want to see her."

"I do not know that I have a sister!"

"Indeed? Do you doubt your father's dying statement?"

"I do not even know that he was my father."

"Why, of course he was! Have you not always lived with him?"

"How do I know? I might have been stolen by him when a child! I have sometimes suspected I was of different blood, our natures were so different."

Prince Pistol laughed—a peculiar harsh, grating laugh it was.

"You are getting romantic, it strikes me. Never let it bother your mind that Storm Cloud was not your father, for I know he was!"

"How do you know?"

"From the very fact that I know more of your personal history than you think I do. But, I must not tarry. Is there no inducement by which I can persuade you to accompany me?"

"None whatever."

"Suppose I try force?"

"You had better not try it!" Sunshine replied, as, with flashing eyes, she laid a hand on the hilt of a revolver—a self-cocker at that. "If you are a robber, I fear you not, and any attempt you make at forcing me, in any manner, will result in your destruction. Bear that in mind!"

"Oh! well, if you want to stay here, do so!" Prince Pistol retorted, angrily. "I am sure I don't care a fig. Tell me one thing before I go: how much am I to expect as my half of the fortune, for carrying out this vendetta?"

"That you will never know, until the job is done!" Sunshine quietly replied.

Prince Pistol, evidently much annoyed, strode from the hut, mounted his horse, and rode away.

Sunshine gazed after him with studious eyes.

"He is a bad man!" she murmured, "and he means me no good. I shall have to be on my guard."

And in this she was right. Prince Pistol did propose trouble for her.

CHAPTER VIII.

JIMMY JUNEBUG TAKES THE WAR-PATH.

WHEN Deadwood Dick, Jr., and Old Avalanche left the house of Justin Gilbert, they made their way direct to the "Ruthven," one of the principal saloons of Cascade City, and took seats at a rear table, Dick being in disguise.

After ordering drinks and cigars, the Great Annihilator remarked:

"Well, Dickey, me boy, what d'ye think of it?"

"To tell the Bible truth, Avalanche, I don't know exactly what to think of it," Dick replied, blowing a cloud of smoke into the air, and watching it vanish into nothingness. "It's an enigma."

"By ther great ham-bone, ye'r right. Ye'r kinder sp'cious, ain't ye?"

"Yes; to tell the truth, I am. This Gilbert has a secret, but he's chary about giving away the first item of it. He knows this Storm Cloud, or has known him in the past, and he knows who this Prince Pistol is. There's not a doubt about that, else why did he faint when he received Pistol's note, which was before he possessed any knowledge that a vendetta had been declared against him?"

"Yes, them aire facts! Kinder 'pears, too, judgin' by 'pearances, thet Prince Pistol an'

thet Valentine Vassar aire one and the same persons."

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"Well, what's to be did? We've taken the job of findin' the gal, I s'pose?"

"Yes, and we'll find her. They let me out of jail when there seemed no hope of escape, and I will keep my promise if I die for it."

"Great ham-bone, course ye will! Never know'd ye ter break faith with any one yet. But, et's goin' to be a mighty hen-hum of a job, ye ken bet your sweet life!"

"Possibly; but we are the boys who are equal to the emergency, eh, old pard?"

"Rip snortin' snappin' turtles! your head aire as level as a flap-jack. We aire ther people—we have traveled. But what aire yer plans?"

Dick remained silent a few minutes, evidently in deep thought.

"Well," he said, finally, "I reckon you had better trip up to that mountain hut, and do a little skirmishing. Most likely the girl, Sunshine, will remain there or in the vicinity, to see that no one steals away the fortune. If so, and Vassar is in the mountains, he will visit and consult with her. You lie low, and track him to his lair, and then come and report, and we'll soon gobble him up."

"Good idea. And you?"

"I'll lay around camp here, and keep an eye out. If he is here working his funny business, I'll soon size him up!"

"Bet yer life ye will, Dickey! Ye'r jest ther chap as kin do that job, by ther great antediluvian ham-bone! So Prudence, Jeremiah and I will amble off fer ther mounting at once. But, one thing, Dickey: ye don't wanter let 'em get onto ye ag'in, or they'll string ye up, surer than thunder!"

"Never fear," Dick replied, "for I shall be on the alert, and besides, I have a good stock of disguises in this vicinity, and can fix myself up so that even you wouldn't know me."

"You bet ye can, me boy. Ye'r as good at that sort o' biz'ness as war yer predecessor, the Dick of old. Waal, look out fer yerself, fer ther Terrific Triangle aire about ter start off on er eperdemic excursion of devastation an' demolition!"

And so saying, the Annihilator arose and left the saloon, Dick soon after following his example.

Avalanche made his way to the outskirts, where he had left his two faithful companions on his arrival in town, and found them making the best of the excellent forage.

"Come, Prudence, ye or'ney, ugly Arabian charger, edge yerself up heer, whar I kin straddle yer back-bone; and you, Jeremiah, get yer batterin'-ram ready fer work, fer ther Great Triangle aire off on a rampage, an' ther's whiskers on ther moon. Prepare yerself to hump, howl an' hurrah, an' thes devastatin' diabolical deluge o' demolition will percede to move."

The Triangle was soon under motion.

Although he was not exactly sure of the location of the Hermit's hut, Avalanche laid his course as near in the direction of it as he was able, and presumed that if by daybreak he could reach the top of the range, he could readily ascertain his bearings, for seldom the veteran traveled over a strange section that he did not note something which he could readily recall or recognize at another time.

He rode along as fast as it was Prudence's inclination to progress, and although his mind was busied with the case he was undertaking, he was none the less alert.

Several times he thought he heard sounds as of pursuit, and would halt and listen, but in vain; no sound could he then distinguish.

"Dog-goned quare," he muttered, on one of these occasions. "I could 'a' sworn I heerd hoss's hoof-strokes then, and the hoss was shod, too. Can't be I'm foller'd, for who'd foller m—? —cept et was that pesky Prince Pistol, an' I reckon et ain't he, fer he'd be purty apt to give me a sockdolager in the back. Well, Prudence, let's mawg on!"

The night was so dark that he could only distinguish objects a few feet from him. On he rode but suddenly halted, with a startled exclamation, and his trusty rifle flew quickly to his shoulder.

A horseman had wheeled out of the darkness, and drawn rein almost directly in front of him.

"Hey! let up, there! Don't shoot!" cried this apparition. "I'm a friend!"

"Great ham-bone, who ther dickens aire ye?" Avalanche demanded, in amazement, for he could only discern dim outlines of the figure in front of him.

"I'm Jimmy Junebug!" was the reply.

"An' who in thunderation is Jimmy Junebug?"

"Why, I'm the kid w'ot runs errands to Mayor Gilbert. Ye see'd me, to-night!"

"Great ham-bone! An' w'ot yer doin' way up heer?" the Annihilator demanded, riding forward, and peering at the gamin, who was mounted upon a fine horse, and armed to the teeth.

"Why, I'm goin' wi' you, ter be sure, in s'arch o' Miss Gracie. I'm Junebug Jim, the Texas ranger."

"Waal, you'd better Junebug Jim right back ter Cascade City!" Avalanche declared, gruffly, "fer yer can't sashay erlong wi' this outfit, I tell yer."

"An' I tell yer I kin, an' I will!" Jim declared, emphatically. "I'm jest the hairpin as aire goin' to ther rescue, an' yer can't help yerself!"

"Can't, hey?"

"Nixee! Maginness! Ef ye won't let me jog along in yer company, I'll tag on behind, an' be in at the death, in spite uv yer. Yer don't know Jimmy Junebug, yet!" and Avalanche was about ready to admit to himself that he did not.

"Say, ye durned little gopher, don't ye know ye'll get salivated plum dead?" he cried.

"Can't help that," retorted James, heroically. "Bound ter see what sport's goin' on about this country, ef et costs me a wing."

"Et'll cost ye yer life!"

"Can't help that. Might's well peg out when I'm young and inncerent as when I'm old an' sinnerful, like you."

"Then ye won't take the back trail?"

"Nixee! Goin' in ter see the circus. I'm lookin' fer ther celebration an'll find it, sure."

"Well, come along, then. Hope to ham-bone you'll get winged afore the night's over. These vere youth what aire comin' up, nowadays, hain't got no more sense than a spavined mule what thinks she kin trot in two-forty!"

"An' a heap of 'em youth aire too flip for the old Alecks, daddy," was the gamin's reply, as he wheeled in alongside the Annihilator. "I tell ye there's no Pairis Green on this bug! I'm a bug what come from New York, where they kill stage Injuns by ther hundred!"

And thus they rode along, Jimmy doing nearly all the talking.

It was high daylight when they reached the mountain crest from where they could command a most extensive view.

CHAPTER IX.

PRINCE PISTOL ABROAD.

AFTER the departure of Old Avalanche, on his mission to the mountains, Deadwood Dick, Jr., betook himself to a point some four miles beyond the outskirts, where in an indenture in the mountain-side was a little cave, or rather a niche, for it was hardly large enough to admit of the passage of a man's body.

Reaching into this, up to the shoulder, the detective drew out a canvas bag, which was stuffed full.

He emptied its contents upon the ground, and a motley assortment of disguises was revealed. A theatrical wardrobe could hardly have been more complete.

This done, Dick began sorting over the costumes, selecting such as he wanted.

There were rough and genteel outfits, and Dick chose the latter, and when he had donned the dress the change was remarkable.

He represented a man of middle age, rigged out in a neat-fitting dark cloth suit, immaculate white shirt and collar, while for ornaments he wore a diamond stud, a watch and chain, and a seal ring. His head was adorned by a soft black felt.

He wore a mass of jet-black hair, and a full black beard and mustache covered the better portion of his face. He looked the genteel gambler to perfection, for the make-up was certainly admirable.

Although the disguise had been effected in utter darkness, it was all that could be desired.

"Well, I guess this will do. I don't think any one will know me now," he soliloquized, "and so I'll amble back to Cascade. I've a large notion that this vendetta villain, Prince Pistol, is haunting the place, and if so, I shall certainly lay for him, with a vengeance, leaving Old Avalanche to look after the girls."

He restored the other things to their place in the niche, and journeyed rapidly back toward Cascade City.

The hour was getting late, but the saloons were open and in full blast.

Reaching camp, Dick made a tour of the saloons, to see what was going on.

Not until he passed the doors of the Ruthven did he find anything that particularly attracted his attention.

There he observed a party of six gathered around a card-table, playing poker.

One was Justin Gilbert, another Sheriff Hopkins, and the others Dick did not know, although one of them was a flashily-dressed chap, wearing a large amount of jewelry, and sporting a graceful mustache, which had been colored jetty black, and waxed out to a point at the ends.

He was rather an attractive-looking fellow, except for a sinister sort of look about the eyes. His hands were as small and white as a woman's, and his fingers manipulated the cards with surprising deftness.

He evidently was a player of skill and experience. Already he had a large stack of checks in front of him, while the others were buying continually, and losing as they bought.

Mayor Gilbert and the dandy were opposite, so Dick took his position facing Gilbert, that the mayor might have a chance to study him, Dick wishing to see if his disguise would be penetrated.

The mayor did give him several inquiring glances, but not the least expression of recognition.

From the moment Dick took up his position behind the dandy, that player began to lose steadily, until nearly half of his checks had disappeared.

Then, uttering an oath, he wheeled about.

"See here, you fellow, what do you mean by standing behind me and giving my hand away?" he cried, angrily. "What d'ye mean, sir?"

"Who's been giving your hand away?" retorted Dick.

"You have, cuss you!"

"You are mistaken," Dick replied, quietly,

"I am not mistaken."

"I reiterate you are."

"You're a liar!"

Dick's hand quickly and heavily gripped the dandy by the shoulder.

"Sir, don't utter that again," he cried, in stern tones, or I'll make you repent it."

"You will, eh? You're a liar!"

And as he spoke the dandy leaped to his feet, and attempted to draw a revolver from his hip pocket.

Before he could do so, however, he was seized by the iron arms of Deadwood Dick, Junior, and hurled fair and square over that young athlete's head.

The dandy landed on his neck and shoulders, and the wonder was that his neck was not broken.

He arose with a howl of rage, but only to find the diamond-sighted six-shooter leveled at his heart.

"Take a quiet sneak from this vicinity, Mister Dandy, and never return while I'm around here, or there'll be cause for a coroner's inquest. If ever I see your face in this town again I'll give away who Prince Pistol is. Now *sneak*," and Dick spoke with menacing sternness.

The dandy darted a dagger-like glance at Dick, as much as to say, "Who are you?" Then turning, he made a flying leap through a window into a side yard and disappeared from view.

The leap would have done credit to a professional gymnast.

Justin Gilbert had sprung from the table, wildly excited at the mention of the name, Prince Pistol.

"Was that Prince Pistol?" he fairly yelled, addressing his query to Dick.

"I should beg to remark in the affirmative," was the quiet response.

"Then, who in Heaven's name are you? Why didn't you tell me that was Prince Pistol?"

"In answer to your first: My name is Bill Jinks. To No. 2: How should I know you wanted to see Prince Pistol?" was the cool reply.

The Mayor of Cascade City sunk back in his chair with a groan.

"Would to God I had known it was that fiend!" he muttered, "he would never have got out of this house alive!"

"He would have killed you before you could have drawn a pop," Dick declared.

"How so?"

"Because he had a revolver up his sleeve. Here it is!" and the detective exhibited a small pattern weapon which the bandit had dropped as he sprung through the window.

The mayor was deathly white.

The crowd was visibly excited, for all knew of the singular occurrence at Gilbert's office.

The mayor leaned across the table, toward Bill Jinks, who had dropped into the seat lately occupied by the young bandit.

"Do you know this Prince Pistol?" he hoarsely asked.

"I've heard of him."

"Do you know where he can be found?"

"No. If I did I'd not be here."

"Five hundred—ay! a thousand, if you tell me!"

Gilbert was intensely excited—so was the crowd.

"You might offer me a million!" Jinks quietly replied, "and I could not tell you."

"Why not?"

And a dozen revolvers were leveled at the detective simultaneously.

"Because I do not know," was the unflinching reply.

"Then!" demanded Gilbert, "how do you know it was Prince Pistol? Explain that!"

Dick laughed quietly.

"Keep your shirts on, gentlemen—don't get excited. I had heard of Prince Pistol before, but never had seen him. However, I had received a description of him, and when I walked into this room, a stranger to you all, I marked him out as no common citizen. The way he was skinning you convinced me of that. You are all good card-players, but had no show with him. This accorded with the description I had received.

"You know what followed. I drew him into what might have been a row. I got the best of him. I held him at my mercy. I called him by the title he bears, and he betrayed himself by the start he gave, and the alacrity with which he made his exit. Now, gentlemen, is that a satisfactory explanation to you, or is it not?"

There was a faint burrah throughout the room.

Mayor Gilbert was the only man who looked his disapproval.

"But, sir, knowing this man to be an outlaw, and having him covered by your weapon, why did you let him escape? Why didn't you shoot him down like a dog?"

Bill Jinks smiled.

"Well," he said, leaning his elbows on the card-table, "in the first place, I never shoot puppies—too small game for me. In the second place, before I put the pepper and salt to a man, I want to know precisely who he is. There you have it in a nut-shell."

Mayor Gilbert started—looked rather anxious.

"You are a detective?" he jumped at.

"A trifle in that direction."

"Then you are the very man I want. Will you be kind enough to call at my house, tomorrow?"

"Certainly, if in all this vast city I can find it!"

"Thank you. I guess there will be no trouble about that. Jinks—William Jinks, I believe you said your name was."

"Not at all. My name is Bill Jinks. No William Henry in mine," at which the crowd roared in good humor, and one of the players proposed to go on with the game of poker, and soon the chips were changing hands at a lively rate, and went so, for a time; then matters began to change; one man was sweeping everything before him, and that man was the Mayor of Cascade.

The limit was a hundred "cold bones."

The other players began to look anxious.

The mayor was getting jubilant, and alternating his winnings with "setting 'em up" for the crowd.

"Bill Jinks" was watching him closely, and with looks of decided disapproval, but the mayor heeded not frowns.

When the game was at the hight of its excitement, a stranger entered, and gazed on the board, as others were doing.

No one had ever seen him, before.

He was of fairly good hight, and quite portly. His face was enveloped nearly to the eyes by a mass of brown hair, while the hair upon his cranium was equally plentiful.

His attire was that of a man who might have money; plain, but business-like and tailor made.

He watched the game until he saw that the other players were disgusted at the mayor's luck; then—

"This yere game rather seems to be one-sided, pards. Tain't fair ter hev all ther pie go to one man, and crust ter another. Dunno what any o' ye aire wu'th, but I've go' a couple o' bits, an' I jest cum up from Snow'd-In) thet I kin clean out ther highest winner, one game o' pitch!"

"How much money hev ye got?" demanded Gilbert, springing excitedly to his feet, notwithstanding a nudge from in under the table by Bill Jinks.

"Waal, let me see," answered the new-comer, reaching into various pockets, and from each one fetching forth a wad of bills. "Reckon how's mebbe I can kiver ye, stranger, ef I do come from Snowed-In. What ye got? See 'f I

can kiver et. Like ter hev piles alike, ef posseble, you bet?"

The mayor counted over his money with nervous fingers.

"Two thousand, five hundred, exactly!" he said, after a minute.

"Just my fortune, exactly!" declared the stranger, slapping the money on the table. "Count it and suit yerself, boss. That's the way we do in Snowed-In."

The mayor did count it, and nodded.

"Correct!" he said. "By the way, stranger, what's your name?"

"I'm Saul Jackson, from Snow'd-In. Own the hull cussed town. Five mines, an' all a-boomin'. Heerd ther' was a chance up hyer to buy, and so I cum on."

"Who here wants to sell?"

"Just fergit ther' name. Name begins wi' a G."

"Gilbert?"

"Keerect! That's ther' name. Know him?"

"Yes. Who said he wanted to sell?"

"Couldn't say, now. Whoever it was sed it was a fine lay-out, and would cost a heap. Sez I: 'To the thunder! What care I, long's I get a place warmer 'n Snow'd-In, winter-time?' Cussedest place, cold-weather-time, ye ever did see!"

"Would you be willing to pay a fair price for a good property, sir?"

"Sure! Nothin' stingy 'bout me. Wads o' boodle an' bonds."

"Then call around and see me to-morrow, at ten. I am Gilbert."

"Fer heaving's sake, ye don't tell me! Very man I'm looking for. Shake!"

They did "shake"—across the table.

"Now, let's play the game," Gilbert said; "then I must leave you until to-morrow. Come around then and I'll give you a bargain."

"Kerect! Everybody watch the game, and see it's done squar'. No shenanigan business 'round me."

The game was played and there were many spectators.

The mayor played his best, but it was no use; his adversary raked in the pot.

Gilbert then arose, rather crestfallen, but put out his hand, and said:

"Good boy, Jackson! Don't fail to call around to-morrow. Good-night."

"Good-night," was the reply.

The Mayor of Cascade City left the Ruthven, to be touched on the shoulder as he left the door.

He turned to discover Bill Jinks.

"Can I be present at that interview to-morrow?" was the question put.

"Yes!" was the curt answer, and then he strode on.

CHAPTER X.

CONSIGNED TO THE FLAMES.

We must return to Old Avalanche, and our young friend, Jim Junebug, whom we left on the mountain crest, where they could command an extensive view of the surrounding country.

It was certainly a grand one, with the sun just rising and shedding its rays over miles upon miles of rugged, quake-rented country.

The keen gaze of the Annihilator swept hither and thither in every direction.

The two horsemen stood out in bold relief against the sky, and this occurred to Avalanche when he discerned a belt of timber.

"Great ham-bone thet knocked the larynx of old Joner silly! We mustn't be standin' here like a pair of English gawks. Yonder's the place"—pointing toward the pines. "We must get down into yonder arroyo, leave our horses, and foot it the rest o' the way. Now, younker, see that ye do as I do, or that'll be trouble in the camp, and you'll get a rap over the head that will lay you out!"

"Kerect, boss! Ef I don't imitate yer every move to the wiggle of yer ear, kick me cl'ar over the moon!" retorted Jimmy.

"Lookee here. None o' yer funny bizness ears!"* Avalanche cried, so fiercely that the boy almost fell off his horse.

The Annihilator then went on:

"Yes, boyee, them aire floppers war peeled off close to my head by cutlaws, years ago. But I got even wi' ther cusses, thet did it!" and the Annihilator's eyes sparkled with the satisfaction he had secured.

"Did it hurt?" Jim innocently asked.

* It will be remembered by the reader that in the year of 1875 the Annihilator had his ears shaved off close to his head.—AUTHOR.

"Did it hurt? Oh! no—not at all! Just red-hot old fun, by the great ham-bone! So was this too—this war simply immense, ye know!" and doffing his hat, the Annihilator exposed to view the spot where the scalp had been torn from his head. A thin parchment-like skin now covered the skull.

Jim Junebug gazed with unfeigned admiration at the hero of a hundred battles.

"Well, by the hoppin hyena! Ef you ain't boss, daddy!" he declared. "Ef you was tew go to New York ye'd get five hundred dollars a week in a dime museum! But, come; we ain't movin'."

"Neither we are, boyee—neither we are. Come erlong now, an' do as I do."

"What, get skulped an' lose me ears?" snickered Jim.

To which he got no answer.

They rode down into the valley, and followed its course toward the pines.

When at a proper distance, Avalanche drew rein, and dismounted, as did Junebug Jim.

"Now, boyee," continued the old detective, "you stay here and hold yer horses. Keep Jeremiah here, too, while I go and reconnoiter."

"What, me keep *that* anamal?" exclaimed Jim, eying the goat suspiciously. "Not much, mister. I got a car-load of horns throw'd ag'in' me once, an' that'll do."

Jimmy was not at all pleased, either that Avalanche wanted him to remain behind. If there was to be any fun, James wanted to see it, and share it.

"Jeremiah, you stay *there!*" ordered the scout, as he might have addressed a dog, and Jeremiah obeyed, though he shook his head, and stamped his foot, angrily.

When the Annihilator had disappeared from view, however, Jeremiah's anger seemed to increase, for he turned his attention to Jim, eyed him a moment, disapprovingly, and then, shaking his head, gave vent to an angry "ba-a-a!"

That was enough for the ex-street Arab. He gave one wild cry, as if Satan and all his imps were after him, and the alacrity with which he leaped into the saddle, was amusing.

Jerry seemed satisfied, for he commenced browsing in the immediate vicinity of the horse.

For the life of him, Jim dare not dismount. He had a holy terror of William goats, since the momentous occasion he had referred to.

After leaving the valley, Avalanche crept up the steep decline toward the row of pines, aiming his course in a direction which he thought might bring him on a direct line with the hut.

Nor was he mistaken. Old and experienced trailer that he was, he rarely missed his bearing.

Creeping stealthily through the pines, which grew closely he soon came in sight of the hut, which was built in an open space, of about half an acre.

The door of the hut was open, and as he crept nearer, he could see Sunshine flitting about on the inside, busied with what little housework she had to attend to.

"Humph! mighty peart sorter girl!" the old scout declared, with a chuckle. "Now, Dickey aire jest like t'other Dick, 'bout gals. One gal ain't enuff fer him—he's a hog—wants 'em all. One w'u'd ha' been a great plenty fer Alva. Can't help remember the time thet old, ugly, red-headed, toothless maid, Sabina Shortgear, tried to draw me inter her net. But, she couldn't come it, tho', nary time! She could whisper poetry by the hour, she could lollygag, swap spits, an' all that sorter bizness, but she couldn't tackle on to old Alva, nary's the time!"

The veteran chuckled softly, at the remembrance.

Ha! what was this?

A party of six men, well mounted, and armed to the teeth, swept out from among the pines at the opposite side of the glade, and drew up in front of the cabin.

They were not masks, but all wore full heavy black beards of one style, which gave them the appearance of being brothers.

As they drew rein, one who had been slightly in advance of the rest, slipped quickly from the saddle, and bounded into the hut, with the evident intention of surprising its inmate.

He soon reappeared, dragging Sunshine after him by the wrist.

Her screams of terror rent the air.

"Release me, sir! let me go!" she cried, struggling desperately to break free.

"Not much, my daisy!" her captor replied, with a sardonic laugh. "Ther captin give us orders to fetch ye, an' you've got ter go, whether ye want to or not."

"I won't go! I won't go!" screamed Sunshine,

continuing her struggles. "This is an outrage, and I won't go a step!"

"Oh! yes, you will," was the confident reply. "We're amply able to handle a young heifer like ye, an' so ye might hush yer yawp, and act sensible. Hi! boys, one o' you help me to bind her, fer she's stronger nor a young buffer."

One of the outlaws was about to dismount, when there was the report of a rifle, near at hand, and he tumbled from the saddle to the ground, in a heap.

"Quick! boys, Jake's been killed," yelled the ruffian who was struggling with Sunshine. "Away! and capture the assassin!"

With vengeful cries the others hastened to obey.

One of the number had seen a puff of smoke come from the pines, and led off in that direction.

Before the glade was crossed, however, he threw up his arms with a yell, and toppled out of the saddle, simultaneous with another rifle-report.

The others dashed on.

They plunged into the timber with wild yells, and became lost to view.

Presently, sounds of a deadly conflict, such as the rapid discharge of fire-arms, supplemented with yells of pain and rage. Then the sounds of battle died out, and directly two of the outlaws came from the timber, leading between them a prisoner.

It was Old Avalanche, whose hands were bound behind his back, and who was literally covered from head to foot with blood.

Nevertheless, he walked with a firm step, and did not appear to have sustained any serious injury.

The other two outlaws who entered the glade, came not forth.

In the mean time, the ruffian at the hut had succeeded in effecting Sunshine's complete capture, and had bound her securely in the saddle.

"Hello! who've you got there?" he demanded, as his two pals came up, leading the Annihilator.

"It's the cuss what laid out Jake an' t'other boys, boss!" was the reply. "We had to fight like demons ter take him, but we got there all all the same, an' here he is!"

"Who aire you, old man?" the leader of the gang demanded, glaring at Avalanche, savagely.

"None o' yer bizness!" was the gruff response. "Let me once get free, an' by ther great ham-bone, I'll show ye who I am!"

"Waal, I guess not, old rack-a-bones. Ye'r' entirely too numerous to be left layin' around loose, you be. You've killed off four of our pards, an' I'll be eternally cussed ef we don't make ye hump fer it! I say, boyees, shall we lynch the skunk?"

"Lynchin' aire too good fer him!" growled one of the men. "He orter be skinned alive."

"I've got an idear," said the third. "Why not tie him up so he can't wiggle, throw him inter the hut, an' set fire to it. 'Twould be sarvin' him just right!"

The proposition was hailed with approval by the others, and preparations were immediately made for carrying out the inhuman scheme.

Avalanche's feet and limbs were bound, so that there was no possibility of his escaping; then he was thrust within the hut, and the door was closed.

"Now, boys, fire the old den, and we'll make off, for there's no telling but what the old cuss may have companions in the neighborhood," ordered the leader of the band. "We'll away to the stronghold, and if we succeed in getting the girl there, in safety, it will be a feather in our cap, for the captain will pan out nobly."

"Oh! sir, I beg of you, in the name of humanity, to let me go!" Sunshine declared, in great distress.

"Not much, me lady. The capt'in ordered us ter fetch ye, an' that's what we're goin' ter do, you bet."

"The captain! Who is he? I know of no such person, sir!"

"Don't ye? Waal I persume ye will know him, 'fore many hours. Ther capt'in aire Prince Pistol, ef ye want ter know et, an' he ain't ther most angelic cuss ter git along wi'; so ye'd better try an' be as sweet spoken as ye kin."

The hut was, by this time, fired in several places; then, the outlaws mounted, and with their captive rode rapidly away, leaving Old Avalanche to face a horrible doom.

CHAPTER XI.

KATE KEITH.

On the outskirts of Cascade City stood a rude log cabin, which had been one of the first

edifices ever built in the camp. Its owner had sometime since moved into better quarters, and the cabin had remained tenantless, until within a very recent period, since when it had, unknown to the public, had an occupant. Being isolated from other dwellings, no one ever went near enough to learn if it was inhabited or not.

Then, too, the tenant kept herself so closely within doors, that no one caught a glimpse of her.

She was a woman of medium stature, whose appearance indicated that she was past middle age. Once, no doubt, she had been a woman of rare beauty and personal attractions, but, now, dissipation had left its unmistakable mark upon her face, and her cheeks were sunken, her skin sallow, her eyes lusterless. Her hair was frowsy, and liberally streaked with gray; her attire was tattered and ill-fitting. Her whole appearance seemed to bespeak extreme poverty.

The only furniture in the cabin was a few rude and broken pieces left behind by the former tenant. A couple of blankets in one corner answered the purpose of a bed, and a few cooking utensils hung by the fire-place, where a fire of pine cones burned ruddily.

It was the night of the day that Dick Bristol assumed the role of Bill Jinks.

It was past the midnight; yet the old woman sat upon a stool before the hearth, gazing moodily into the glowing embers, as her chin rested in her hands.

Although the fire seemed to have some peculiar fascination for her, and she appeared to be in a reverie, it was plain she was expecting somebody, for every now and then she would partly turn in a listening attitude toward the door.

Finally, a footstep sounded on the hard ground, outside; then there were three light raps upon the door, which she quickly arose and opened, and a young man entered—the same dandified personage whom a few hours before Deadwood Dick Junior had caused to take a hasty departure from the Ruthven saloon.

He brushed past the woman and seated himself upon the stool she had just vacated, whereupon she flashed at him a glance of displeasure.

"Well?" she demanded, "what's the matter, now?"

"Enough is the matter!" he growled. "I have been discovered!"

"By whom?—how? Explain yourself!" and she appeared to be much excited.

"Oh! through my cussed foolishness, of course," he growled. "I dropped into the Ruthven, and fell into a game of cards with Gilbert and three other fellows, and of course I fell to 'em, with a vengeance. I was hawling in pot after pot, and getting a fat boddle, when a chap comes in, walks up behind me and looked on. I didn't recognize him, but he must have exerted the devil's own influence over me, for I immediately began to lose, hand after hand, 'til my pile begun to look sick. Then we got into a quarrel, and the cuss threwed me over his head, and I came near breaking my neck. When I arose he had me covered, and ordered me to sneak away, warning me if I was ever seen in the vicinity again, he would give away who Prince Pistol was. That was enough for me, and I dusted out, lively. I went back, afterward, however, in disguise, and to-morrow shall have an interview with his mayorship!"

"Ah! then you will fix things?" the old woman demanded, eagerly.

"That depends altogether on what success I have. The fact of it is, cousin, I'm not particularly glad I ever took hold of the job!"

"Bosh! you're a fool, Valentine!" the woman replied, half angrily. "By whatever other means could you and I acquire such a princely fortune?"

"But, you will please remember that I haven't seen any fortune, yet?" Valentine replied, doubtfully.

"Patience! patience!" was the snapping rejoinder. "You cannot expect to do everything in a day. When you have ended the vendetta, according to Storm Cloud's instructions, half of his fortune comes to us, not to speak of what we get out of Justin Gilbert."

"To us, eh?" and Valentine Vassar shrugged his shoulders, suggestively.

"Why, most assuredly to us!" the woman replied, in a harsh voice. "Surely you must know I intend to get my share of whatever money is secured."

"I don't know why you are entitled to any share," Vassar retorted. "You are not doing the work!"

"Well, you refuse to divide up with me, and see how quick I will spoil your plans, you alms-house beggar!" the woman cried, with sudden fierceness. "You will find that Kate Keith is no fool!"

"I haven't said you shouldn't share with me!" Vassar replied, rather submissively. "So let the matter drop where it is. You needn't throw up poor-house in my face, for I am well aware that you adopted me from such an institution, and brought me up. But what for? For no good purpose, and you know it. You brought me up in the way you would have me go; brought me up depraved and dishonest, and molded me to your will, to be your tool, and to do your bidding. You surrounded me in crime, until there was no avenue of escape for me, and to disobey you and incur your displeasure, meant to consign myself to the gallows. Ah! Kate Keith, I have but little to thank you for, even though you did bring me up!"

There was a bitterness in the young man's tone that caused the woman's eyes to sparkle, and a harsh laugh burst from her thin lips.

"Yes, 'tis true I took you from the poor-house and brought you up for a purpose—the one soul-absorbing purpose of my life—revenge!" she said, grimly. "That revenge has not yet been satisfied, even though it now is nearly twenty years since I took you under my wing. It is true I had to get you into the mire so that I would have you irretrievably in my power, and you would not dare disobey me. And yet, have I not always assured you that I would sometime put you in possession of a fortune, so you could retire at your ease?"

"And yet!" Vassar said, looking up with manifest curiosity, "until I told you of my strange experience on the mountain, an' about the vendetta, you knew nothing about Storm Cloud's fortune."

Kate Keith smiled, significantly?

"You little know all that I knew, or know!" she answered. "The story Storm Cloud told you was in the main part a lie, and the names he gave you were with one exception fictitious. Do you want to know what this Storm Cloud's name really was?"

"Yes!" Vassar replied, eagerly.

Kate Keith bent forward so that her lips nearly touched his ear, and uttered a name in a whisper.

Vassar started, and looked incredulous.

"It is true," she declared, and one of these days you shall know the whole story in its truth. But not now. You must first carry out my plans, and fulfill Storm Cloud's vendetta. Then you will be independently rich, and shall know all. You will not fail, Valentine?"

"No!" he declared, rising, "I will not fail. I have gone so far, and will now carry out the programme to the letter."

"Bravely spoken, and your reward shall be a rich one!"

"I am not so sure of that. Sunshine may refuse to give up the gold. She is a stubborn filly."

"Let her dare to refuse!" Kate Keith hissed. "But, then, I know she will not dare. You had best be going, for Gilbert may have put spies on your track, and it would not do for you to be caught here."

"Yes, I'll go!" Vassar replied, "for there is plenty of work ahead for Prince Pistol, King of the West!"

And he took his departure.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DESERTER.

JUSTIN GILBERT went direct from the Ruthven to his residence, and let himself in with a night-key.

The servants had long since retired for the night, and so he sat down in the parlor, in the light of the fire that glowed upon the grate, and gave himself up to reflection while he puffed at a cigar.

"This has been an eventful night," he mused, "and I cannot say that I am more than half satisfied with the way things have turned out."

"If that was Prince Pistol with whom I was playing, he must have been there for some purpose other than playing the game. Perhaps, after fleecing me of what money I had, it was his intention to shoot me? Curse the fellow, anyhow! It is lucky I didn't know his identity at first, or I should certainly have tackled him. That it was the man there seems to be no doubt, else he would not have jumped out of the window when Jinks mentioned the name, Prince Pistol.

"And this Jinks! Who is he? Can it be that he is Deadwood Dick, Junior? If so, his disguise is a most perfect one, by my soul! But, I can

not believe it is Dick, for he would not have let Prince Pistol escape, unless—by Heaven! this Deadwood Dick may be a member of Prince Pistol's band!"

The thought was startling—anything but a pleasant one to the Mayor of Cascade City, and after a full hour of deliberation he arose and sought his chamber.

But no sleep visited his eyes. His brain was too active for repose, and by early daybreak, he was up and dressed, and pacing to and fro in the parlor.

Shortly after breakfast, the door-bell rung, and as he could not find Jimmy Junebug anywhere he answered the summons.

A man stood outside—a disreputable looking fellow, with bristling black hair and beard and a reddened countenance that indicated the slave to whisky. His left eye was "in mourning," and thus with his shabby clothing, slouch hat, knee-boots and belt of weapons, rendered him an uninviting looking caller.

He however raised his hat, politely.

"Have I the honor of addressin' the mayor of this hyer camp?" he asked.

"I am that person," Gilbert replied, eying the man sharply. "What is it you want, sir?"

"If it pleases your Honor, I would like ter have a short personal interview with you, sir, as I have some information of the greatest importance to confide to you."

The mayor scrutinized the man a moment, and hesitated, doubting whether it would be best to grant the interview; then he opened the door wider and said:

"Very well. Come in!"

Which the stranger did.

He had noted the mayor's hesitation, for he observed, as he stepped into the hall:

"Needn't be afraid of me, boss, ef I ain't as tony as a dry goods clerk. I've seen better days."

They passed into the parlor and became seated, the caller sitting astride a chair with the back in front of him.

"Now, sir, be kind enough to tell me your name and business," commanded the mayor.

"Kerec. My name is Hank Harkness. Yours is Gilbert, I allow."

"That is my name, sir."

"You own considerable property, hereabouts, eh?"

"I have considerable landed estate, sir. But, what has that to do with this interview?"

"We'll git at that, d'rectly. Ye see, the fact of the case is, boss, I am teetotally bu'sted, and I have come to you to see if I couldn't make a raise of enough spondulics to carry me home to my family in the East."

"Indeed! Why do you come to me? I no not know you, sir."

"I know that, sir, but, yer see, it lies in my power to give ye some pointers on a matter that concerns ye, and I allowed in 'change fer this information, mebbe you'd be willin' to help a felier out."

The mayor was interested.

"Ah!" he said, "Well, sir, if you have information of any sort that is of manifest value to me, I shall be willing to do what I can for you."

"Tho't so, an' that's what fetched me. I s'pose, boss, that you are aware, that you have a deadly enemy, who is scheming to work your ruin? In other words, there's a vendetta ag'in' ye!"

"How do you know that?"

"'Ca'se I know. This enemy o' yours, is called Prince Pistol! He's chief of a band o' outlaws."

"Go on! go on!" Gilbert said, excitedly.

"Until last night," went on Harkness, "I was a member of this outlaw party, but I had a muss wi' some o' the boys, cleaned 'em out, an' skiped, swearing never to lead that sort of a life any more. I want to git East to my family, an' kerry myself straight."

"An admirable resolution," the mayor observed. "But, about the information?"

"Waal! this vendetta that has been placed ag'in' you, is in three parts. First, yer daughter was to be stolen into captivity. This has already been done!"

"Yes! yes! Tell me of her, my child!"

"She is a prisoner in Prince Pistol's stronghold. The second blow will be to get all your property away from you, and reduce ye to beggary. How this is to be done I don't know, b'nt I do know there is some diabolical scheme on foot by which the Prince is confident of accomplishing his purpose within a very few days. The only way I see of your outwitting him is converting your estate immediately into cash. I give you this advic as a friend, knowing how

confident the Prince is of winning. Already an attempt has been made against your property."

"When? how?" demanded the astonished mayor.

"Why, last night, you made the acquaintance of a man, who allowed he wanted you out, not?"

"Yes! yes!"

"He gave you the name of—"

"Saul Jackson!"

"Just so. That name was Prince Pistol, in disguise!"

And with this, Harkness laughed heartily, while Gilbert was astounded.

"So you see, boss, they're hot after you, and bound to win. If you'll take a fool's advice, you'll look out for yourself, for this vendetta is to the death. The last blow, after you are ruined, will be death, which will end the vendetta; then Prince Pistol will inherit the half of a large fortune, recently left behind by an old Indian chief, named Storm Cloud."

"Now, I've told you all this, cause I'm goin' out of the bizness, and thort you ought to know, and to close, I wanter give ye little advice. Sell out everything you've got, root an' branch, and scoop the cash inter yer pocket. Then, pack yer grip, and take a quiet sneak fer other parts. If ye don't, mark my word, they'll twist yer persessions away from ye, in spite o' yer teeth, an' you'll be a dead man inside of a fortnight, an' that's as sure as my name are Hank Harkness. I ain't no lawyer, but I know purty near what I'm talkin' about. Prince Pistol have been makin' his brags that ye won't hold out another week in Cascade City, an' he means business!"

"See here!" Gilbert cried, eagerly. "If I pay you liberally, will you guide a party of men to the outlaw stronghold?"

"No! It would be worse than madness. The gang is so well fortified that a battalion of soldiers could not rout them out in a month's time. I, alone, am capable of gaining entrance to the camp!"

"You? Then—"

"Wait a moment. Now, lookee here, Mr. Gilbert, I ain't the man to see another victim of a spite, an' I don't want you to come to trouble. But, I'll sw'ar that just so sure as you stay heer, ye'r a dead man. So I repeat my advice. Convert yer property inter cash in the quickest possible time, even if ye have to sacrifice upon it. Then, git up an' git!"

"But, man alive, you forget. I cannot depart from here and leave my daughter a prisoner in that devil's power."

"Nor need you. You go ahead and foller my advice. Leave the rest to me. I'll rescue yer gal an' have her with ye, if possible, by termorror's daybreak. Then, ef ye'll help me ter get East, we'll be squar'!"

Justin Gilbert sprung to his feet and seized the stranger by both hands, enthusiastically.

"By Heaven, man, will you do this?" he cried.

"I'll try it, and I reckon I won't fail!" was the reply.

"Then, may God bless you! I will follow your advice at once, and when you return with my daughter, a thousand dollars shall be your reward."

"Kerec, boss; it's a bargain, an' I'm mighty glad ye'r willin' ter profit by the advice of a poor cuss like me. I'll set out at once, an' ef I don't get back early as daybreak, ter-morrer, don't sweat. You'll know I've had some delay in scorin' my p'int. Rest easy, fer when Hank Harkness does return, he'll bring yer darter with him."

"May God watch over and protect you!" fervently cried the Mayor of Cascade City, with tears in his eyes, and then Harkness arose and took his departure, while the mayor made hasty preparations for out-of-doors work.

"I think I know where I can sell out, slick and clean," he muttered; "then I'll leave this accursed town forever. Ay! I'll go, even if I have to go, a poor man!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SALE.

THERE was one man in Cascade City who was full as wealthy as Justin Gilbert; if not wealthier, and his name was Jacob Boyle.

His wealth was not in landed estate, but consisted of hard cash, which he frequently found opportunity to loan out at an enormous usury.

He led rather a nomadic existence—was here one day, there another. Keeping himself posted on the financial standing of business men, generally throughout the Territory, he was quite apt to be around when some unlucky person was in a pinch. On such occasions he reaped his harvest.

When not out on a speculative trip he generally made his home in Cascade City, where he kept a broker's office on a small scale.

On leaving his residence, Justin Gilbert made his way to this office, and found the money-lender in, and engaged in reading an Eastern paper.

Boyle looked up with a pleasant nod at sight of the mayor, and pushed forward a chair.

"Good-morning, Gilbert. Take a seat. Pleasant morning, sir."

"Very pleasant, indeed," was the reply. "Any news of moment?"

"No, nothing particular, except more strikes in the East. By the way, you are not troubled in that way."

"No, my men are quite content. I pay them good wages, and they are satisfied. In fact, we get along famously together. But I fear they will have to look to another employer in the future."

"Why, how is that?"

"Well, I'm getting pretty well along in years, and my health is not the best, so I've made up my mind to retire from active business life and return East."

"Indeed! Is this not rather a sudden notion on your part, Mr. Gilbert?"

"Well, perhaps it is; but you see I'm a man of rather sudden impulses; to make up my mind is to act."

"But how about your daughter?"

"She has been found, and will be restored to me within a few hours, probably."

"That is good news, and I congratulate you. I suppose you will retain your interests here, and appoint a superintendent?"

"On the contrary, such is not my intention. I desire to close out all my interests here at once. You and I had a talk about the mine some time ago, and you made me an offer for it."

"Yes; a hundred and fifty thousand, I believe."

"Just so. Are you prepared to purchase today?"

"Not at those figures. I was rather hasty in making such an offer, and glad, afterward, that you did not accept."

"But the mine has been largely developed since then, and new veins of ore discovered, so it is really worth double what it was then."

"Oh, I don't dispute your word in regard to that, but money is very tight, and the demand is so large that, really, I can let all I have at a big figure."

"But, understand me, it is not alone the mine I wish to dispose of. Besides it, there is my house, with all its furniture, and twenty tenement shanties, occupied by miners, that return a monthly rental of fifteen dollars each. Then there is the improved machinery for working the mine, and, in fact, everything I possess in Cascade, except my personal effects. Now, what will you give me for the whole business?"

Boyle reflected a few minutes, and then busied himself with his pencil.

Finally he looked up.

"Would you want the ready cash?" he demanded.

"Yes, and the papers fixed out at once. You can have possession of all but my residence today—the latter in a day or so."

"Well, since it is you, I will make good my original offer. That is the very best I can do."

Justin Gilbert pondered, for full well he realized that he was making a gigantic sacrifice, the mine alone being worth actually double what he was offered for his entire possessions.

Finally he asked:

"How soon can you have the documents ready for signing, sir?"

"In an hour's time," Boyle replied, glancing at his watch.

"And the money will be ready as soon as they are signed?"

"Exactly."

"Then the property is yours."

"Very well. Call again in an hour and we will close the bargain."

"I will be here," and the Mayor of Cascade City left the office, feeling rather elated.

"Tear my property away from me, will they?" he muttered. "Well, we shall see! Harkness's advice was sensible, and ere to-morrow's sunset, if nothing happens, we shall be miles from here, and Prince Pistol can vent his vendetta upon some one else. Would to Heaven he may cross my path before I go, however, for then I'll teach him that he is dealing with the wrong man!"

It was not yet nine o'clock, and he hastened to the Ruthven, in hopes of meeting Bill Jinks.

Sure enough, he found that individual there, seated at some distance from any one else, smoking a pipe.

Gilbert approached him.

"Good-morning, Mr. Jinks," he saluted.

"How do you find yourself this morning?"

"Quite well, thank you."

"Have you seen anything of my friend Jacksonson?"

Jinks gave him a quizzical look.

"No, nor do I think you are likely to," he replied.

"Ah! why not?"

"Because Jackson is not in town."

"Not in town? How's that?"

"He left last evening, on horseback, for the heart of the mountains. I followed him, on foot, for a short distance, but he soon distanced me."

"You were suspicious of him?"

"Well, yes."

"You are Deadwood Dick, Junior?"

"I am Bill Jinks. By the way, I hear no noise about my being out of jail?"

"There will be none for a few days. Hopkins is in sole charge."

"Ah! I see. I wondered at the silence. You do not seem much surprised at Jackson's departure?"

"No. You were right; I am not likely to see him very soon again."

"I do not understand."

"Then I will explain," and seating himself, the mayor related the particulars of his interview with Hank Harkness.

Deadwood Dick, Junior, listened without interruption.

"And so you are thinking of leaving us, eh?" he finally asked.

"Yes, as soon as my daughter is restored to me."

"Do you think she will be restored to you by this man Harkness?"

"Haven't a doubt of it. I have every confidence in the man."

Dick smiled, and the mayor noticed it.

"You are too suspicious!" he observed.

"Oh! that is a trick of the trade," was the rejoinder. "Will you sell out?"

"I think so."

"Then, I suppose you will have no further need of my services."

"None that I know of now, unless you succeed in running down Prince Pistol ere I take my departure."

They separated soon afterward, and an hour later Justin Gilbert had legally sold his property to Jake Boyle, and received one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in cash.

CHAPTER XIV. AT THE STRONGHOLD.

We must now return to our young friend, Jimmy Junebug, whom we left in a rather ludicrous position, perched upon the back of his horse, safe out of the reach of the butting propensities of Avalanche's William-goat, Jeremiah.

Jeremiah was victor of the hour, and proceeded to graze demurely in the vicinity of Jim's horse, waiting for that young gentleman to dismount; but Jim was not dismounting just then.

"Dog-gone that goat!" he muttered, "I've a mind to shoot him and done with it. I would, too, ef it wasn't fer old rack-a-bones, who thinks so much of the pesky animal. Darn a goat, anyhow! I never did see no good in 'em 'cept to eat up hoop-skirts an' waste-paper. Ba-a-a! ye darned thing you! Wish I had a long-tailed whip so I could give ye a couple o' licks. Jest see how demure an' lamb-like he looks. But, ef I were ter git down on terry-firmer he'd go fer me like a hen after buckwheat. Wonder how long I've got to stay humped up here afore old No-Ears comes back? Golly, ain't I glad no one ain't around lookin', fer I must look as comical as a bull on a bicycle!"

Some time elapsed ere Jimmy was relieved from his awkward position; then he was startled by the report of a rifle up in the direction of the mountain hut.

"Jeminny Christmas! There's somethin' up. Like enuff Old Avalanche hes been popped. Hope I may never eat if I ainter goin' to investigate. I'm out on ther war-path, an' I'm goin' to see the circus, by cracky!"

Forgetting the goat in his sudden excitement, he vaulted from the saddle and, rifle in hand, started on a run in the direction he had seen Avalanche go.

As he ran the reports of more weapons reached his hearing. Then ensued a blank silence.

It did not take the boy long to make the ascent of the hill, Jeremiah capering complacently along beside him.

When he had gained the summit, Jimmy discovered the hut, way ahead through the green aisles, and also saw that it was on fire.

With increased speed he dashed forward, and was soon in the glade, where he came upon two dead men, but nothing of Avalanche.

He paused a moment and gazed about him; then a horrifying suspicion flashed across his mind, and he bounded away toward the hut, whose door was closed.

The exterior of the cabin, which was old and dry, was a mass of flames, which threw out an intense heat; but minding not the heat, the brave boy rushed forward and kicked open the door.

A puff of smoke came out, but it did not drive him back.

"Avalanche! Avalanche!" he yelled in his excitement and alarm intense.

"Here! here!" came back the faint response. That was enough.

Into the hut Jimmy leaped, and stumbling over the prostrate form of the Annihilator, fell flat; but he was on his feet in an instant, and seizing the bound man by the legs, he quickly dragged him out into the glade.

The veteran was nearly suffocated, and it was several minutes ere he could speak.

Jimmy freed him of his bonds, and at last the Annihilator was able to get upon his feet.

"Boyee!" he gasped, "ye'r a brick!—by ther great ham-bone, ye aire! You've saved my life, an' I thank'ee. But that's no time to say more now. Go! quicker'n lightnin', an' fetch ther hosses! We must away on ther trail!"

Jimmy waited for no second order, but sped rapidly away, while the Annihilator was busied locating the trail of the outlaws. Long experience in the wilderness had made him an expert at this sort of thing, and he was not long in finding which way the villains had gone.

The trail was plain as day, the horses having been shod, and it would be a comparatively easy one to follow.

During Jimmy's absence the scout searched the bodies of the two dead men, but found nothing of account except their weapons.

In a surprisingly short time Jimmy returned, leading his own horse and Prudence Cordelia.

"You're in good time," Avalanche said. "Couldn't have done better myself. How's yer weapons, me boyee?"

"All ready fer a rampage!" Jimmy replied, with a grin. "Golly, you came near gittin' cremated. See, the hut air fallin' in!"

"Yas, that war a close call," was the reply, "and I owe my life to you. I've been in cluss quarters, an' faced death a hundred times before, but I'll sw'ar tew breeches I thort I war a goner this trip. But, we must not wait. The gal's bin carried off by these human wolves, an' we must find her. Mount yer hoss, an' lead Prudence thar. I'm goin' ter foller the trail on foot."

"This was done, and the now ruined hut was soon left quite a distance behind.

All day long that race was kept up, and it was nearly sunset before the Great Annihilator came to a halt.

They were then at a point where the trail entered a narrow, dark ravine, deep down among the mountains, and whose entire bottom was covered by the swift but shallow waters of a mountain torrent.

"Lost ther trail?" Jimmy queried.

"Nary!" was the reply. "They've gone up this way, but that's no tellin' how far. Twon't do ter take ther horses up hyar, till I investigate. So you remain behind with 'em. Don't be alarmed if I don't come back right off."

"Look out ye don't get yerself into a baken-oven ag'in," warned Jimmy. "I moughtn't be able to get you out."

"Don't fear. I will be back as soon as I have reconnoitered."

Then the Annihilator proceeded up the stream, into the dark, narrow confines of the ravine, and was soon lost to view.

Jimmy Junebug dismounted and lay down upon the grass, for he was tired of the saddle, never before this trip having had any such experience.

The minutes dragged by on leaden wings to him, and it was getting quite dark when the Annihilator at length returned.

"Well, what's the wind doin'?" Jimmy interrogated, noting the Annihilator's grim expression.

"Waal, I located the lair," the scout answered, "but didn't venture into it alone. It's in a deep pocket, of which this is the only outlet. A sentinel guarded the passage at the edge of the pocket, but I fixed him all right, and now, if we resky the gals at all, we must do so in purty

short order. Draw a revolver and follow me. If we have to fight do not hesitate to shoot, but fire no shot without my orders."

"Kerect!" Jimmy replied. "Ef it comes to fight, I'll show you what the Junebug can do."

Avalanche leading the way, they entered the ravine, and waded up-stream.

Although the water was scarcely more than ankle-deep, it ran very swift, and in places they found it difficult to retain their footing.

Thus they proceeded for nearly a mile, then suddenly debouched upon the banks of the stream, at the mouth of a little valley—a mountain-locked pocket, as it were, comprising in the neighborhood of twenty acres of level land, covered with luxuriant vegetation.

There was no guard at the mouth of the passage, but a dark object, lying a few yards away, had a suspicious appearance.

A young moon had by this time lifted its face above the horizon, reflecting a pale yellow light of sufficient power to illumine the surroundings.

"This is Prince Pistol's stronghold," Avalanche said, as the two paused, at the pocket outlet, and those tents, yonder, is where the gang hang out, I presume. The moonshine is bad, so you better let me creep forward and reconnoiter before we both venture near the camp," and getting down on hands and knees, the veteran scout crept away.

He soon returned, however, in the same manner he had departed.

"There aire but three men in the camp," he announced, and they are seated outside the furthest tent yonder. Come, careful now! We must find out which tent the gals are in."

On hands and knees, accordingly they both crept cautiously away, and in a few minutes were crawling about among the tents, of which there were a round dozen.

No lights were visible in any of them, except the further one before which the three outlaws sat, in conversation; this was well lighted; but Jimmy discovered a faint glow of light, in another tent, and listening, heard low voices, in conversation.

They were female voices, too.

Without hesitation, he went around to the front of this tent, pulled aside the lapel, and entered, to find himself in the presence of the two girls, who were seated side by side upon the ground.

One was a brunette, the other more of a blonde, and both looked near the same age, and were very pretty.

Both sprung to their feet, at sight of Jimmy, but made no outcry, as a quick motion from him, enjoined them to silence.

"Sh!" Jimmy cautioned. "Et's all squeegee! I'm a friend, and hev come to rescue you, so be brave and keep mum."

The girls clasped their hands, their faces expressing their gratitude and joy.

"Jest hold yer horses, a bit," Jimmy enjoined "till I find my pard, an' then we'll have ye out o' beer in a jiffy."

He left the tent and spent several minutes in creeping around in search of Old Avalanche, but did not find him.

Then he heard an uproar of yells at the further end of camp, and a pistol-shot.

With fast-beating heart, he crept that way.

Soon he was where he could see what was the matter.

Old Avalanche had been recaptured, and the outlaws were binding him to a tree, that grew near their tent.

CHAPTER XV.

VICTORY FOR JIMMY.

AT the discovery of the recapture, Jimmy Junebug was at loss just what to do.

There were three of the outlaws, all big, brawny fellows, and that he could successfully tackle and vanquish them he had no idea, for he had never been in a conflict with weapons, and knew nothing of such warfare.

What, then, was to be done?

Avalanche must be released at all hazards, but just how it was to be done was a puzzler for the ex-street Arab.

He lay flat in the shadow of one of the tents, and watched the maneuvers of the outlaws, fearing they would do the Annihilator some bodily injury.

But they did not.

After binding the scout to the tree, they reseated themselves in front of their tent and lit their pipes.

"Wonder what they mean by that?" Jimmy mused, scratching his head. "They don't appear to be so anxious about doin' up the Annihilator as they were before. Don't kinder understand it unless, mebbe, they're waitin' fer Prince

Pistol ter come. By hooky! that's jest what they are doin'!"

The idea seemed plausible enough, and so Jimmy accepted it.

"I've got ter git Old Avalanche free, somehow, afore mornin'," he muttered, "or he's a gone case. Now, let me see. How am I goin' ter do it?"

He settled himself down to careful deliberation, and considered every chance that presented itself.

Finally a thought struck him.

"It won't do to leave the gals here in peril, nohow," he muttered, "even if Avalanche aire in trouble. I'll get 'em out o' the way, and then see if I can do anything fer the scout."

He crept back to the tent occupied by the two girl prisoners, and entered.

Both maidens were much excited, having heard the yell of Avalanche's capture.

"Oh, what is the matter?" Gracie Gilbert asked, laying her hand on Junebug's arm. "Has Prince Pistol returned to camp, Jimmy?"

"No, not yet; but I allow he's liable to turn up at 'most any minnit. My pard, Old Avalanche, has been captured by the outlaws, an' I've got ter try ter free him. But, first of ail, you gals must be got out of difficulty. Once out of this valley, do either of ye know the way to Cascade City?"

"Dear me, I don't!" Gracie said, in despair.

"But I do," spoke up Sunshine. "I know of two direct routes of reaching the town."

"Then we are all O. K.," Jimmy declared. "I'll take ye ter where our hosses is, an' then ye must mount an' dust fer Cascade as fast as ye kin. Soon's I kin free Old Avalanche, we'll foller."

"Then he didn't burn up in the hut?" Sunshine eagerly asked.

"Nary time! I arrived jest in time to snake him out, when he were nigh 'bout snuffed out. Are ye ready to go?"

"Yes! yes!" both girls answered, eagerly.

"All right. Then git down on yer hands an' knees an' foller me, without so much noise as a grasshopper."

A moment more, and the trio were creeping away toward the outlet of the valley.

Fortunately the moon had gone temporarily in under a cloud, and they were in no danger of being seen.

In due time they reached the mouth of the ravine.

"I reckon you'll have to git yer striped stockings wet," Jimmy observed, "but ye kin git dry ones when ye git hum."

Both girls laughed at the sally, and then the trio entered and descended the stream.

It did not take long before they reached the end of the canyon, and here the animals were found, grazing contentedly.

As neither of the maidens cared to run the risk of riding Prudence Cordelia, both were mounted upon Jimmy's horse, and after expressing the warmest gratitude to their young preserver, they set out for Cascade City, while Jimmy returned toward the locked valley.

When he reached it he paused near the entrance and examined the body of the sentinel whom the Annihilator had slain.

Searching the pockets of the dead man, Jimmy found among other things a silver whistle, attached to a ribbon.

It was probably meant to be used for signal purposes.

Deliberating a few minutes, Jimmy raised the whistle to his lips and blew several sharp, quick blasts. Then, drawing a revolver, he fired a couple of shots.

"Thar'll fetch 'em," he muttered, with a chuckle. "An' while they're here, I'll be thar!" He ran quickly away, keeping in the shadow of the walls.

He saw the three outlaws spring up from the vicinity of their lighted tent, run toward the mouth of the ravine, as fast as they could go.

When they had nearly reached the entrance, the artful boy quickly dashed into the pocket, and in a jiffy was by the Annihilator's side.

To release him was but the work of a moment; then the two darted back into the shadow of one of the tents.

"Boy, ye've did it ag'in!" the old scout said, gratefully. "an' I can't find words to thankee enough. War et you who drew the gang toward the ravine?"

"That's jest what I did."

"Then they'll be back soon. They put my weapons in their tent. I must get 'em."

He crept away, but soon returned, thoroughly armed.

"Now let 'em come," he said, grimly. "I've

wiped out five of the gang, an' kin do up the other three. But come, let's look fer the gals."

"No need of that, Avalanche, old pard."

"Why not?"

"Cause they're already out of the valley, mounted, an' on their way to Cascade. I found 'em an' helped 'em off."

"Boy, ye'r a brick, ef ever ther' was one. I didn't take no sorter stock in ye, at first, but I see now that ye'r a double-compressed, back-action stub an' twist, an' henceforth, et shall do me proud to adopt ye as a member of the great Terrific Triangle. Great ham-bone, yes!"

"All right, daddy. I'm with ye, tooth and toe-nail, an' you'll allus find Junebug Jim around when there's any fun."

"He never killed an Injun,
Ain't much fer killin' game,
But when et comes to the git up an' do
He gets there just the same!"

"Good boyee, Junebug! You'll make yer mark one o' these days, especially ef ye share mess wi' ther Triangle."

"Are you going to remain here till the outlaws return?" Jim inquired.

"Sart'in. When we go back to Cascade, they go along wi' us as prisoners. Ah! here they come! Stand ready wi' yer rifle, an' ef they refuse to surrender, when I order it, drop one of 'em, an' I'll attend to t'other two!"

The outlaws were seen approaching, carrying their dead companion between them.

Suddenly and without warning, they found themselves confronted by the two scouts, and covered by a pair of repeating rifles.

"Surrender!" Avalanche ordered, sternly. "Drop that carcass and throw up yer hands, or ye'r dead men!"

Unnecessary to say the order was quickly obeyed, and in ten minutes' time each outlaw was securely bound to a horse, and Avalanche and Junebug set out on their triumphant return to Cascade, the Annihilator in the lead; then their prisoners and Junebug fetching up the rear.

The Annihilator of course was jubilant, and Jimmy was scarcely less so, for, so far, his first campaign had resulted in lots of "fun!"

CHAPTER XVI.

KATE KEITH.

ONCE more we return to Cascade City.

Justin Gilbert, as stated, had received prompt payment, in clean U. S. greenbacks, of large denominations, and felt sure he was now safe from being robbed by the vendetta Prince.

He put the little fortune carefully away in an inside pocket, and leaving the broker's office sauntered back toward the Ruthven.

Deadwood Dick, Jr., in his disguise of Bill Jinks, was standing outside the saloon as the mayor approached.

"Well, I've gone and done it!" Gilbert announced, as he paused before the detective.

"Done what, sir?"

"Sold out, slick and clean."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, it's a fact. Of course I had to make a big sacrifice—only a hundred and fifty thousand for the whole thing—but it's better than having everything swept away by this enemy, who is hounding me down."

"You are a fool!" Dick said, point-blank.

"Sir-rh!"

"I reiterate, you are a fool!" Dick coolly replied.

"And how am I a fool?"

"Because you have played right into your enemy's hands! He can, by working it right, rob you of everything, where, before, he could not have touched your property."

"Oh! I'll run the risk of being robbed, what little time I yet remain here."

"Well, of course you know your own business best, but I should advise you to look out for yourself. If your enemy is determined to ruin you, he is no doubt cognizant of your every move, and will lay some plan to entrap you."

"Rest assured I shall be alert. If you will name how much I am indebted to you, I will pay you."

"You do not owe me a farthing. You gave me my liberty, while, as yet, I have not been abie to do anything for you. I hope, however, to secure Prince Pistol, and feel confident my friend Old Avalanche will rescue your daughter."

"Oh! he may, providing Hank Harkness don't get ahead of him," the mayor said, carelessly, and walked on.

"Poor fool!" commented Dick; "you will learn, to your cost, maybe, how you have been fooled by this so-called Harkness. If I am not off my reckoning, Harkness is but another part

of the vendetta. Even though you no longer feel the need of my services, Justin Gilbert, I shall not be asleep, until you are well out of this country. You gave me my life and I will try to protect yours!"

Justin Gilbert went on toward his residence.

"I will pack up a few personal effects, and be ready to leave, as soon as Gracie returns. Perhaps I had best remain closely in-doors what time I have yet to stay in this cursed town."

When he entered the house, he was met in the hall by the servant, who said:

"If you please, sir, there's a lady in the parlor who is waiting to see you."

"A lady?"

"Yes, sir. She has been waiting for over an hour."

"Did she give her name?"

"No: she simply said she had business."

Gilbert looked his surprise, and entered the parlor.

He had passed through so many strange experiences in a few days' time that he would scarcely have been surprised had he found Queen Victoria awaiting him.

But, instead, a black-clad woman, heavily veiled, was seated upon the sofa. She did not remove the veil, on his entrance, but simply partly rose, bowed, and sunk back upon the sofa again.

"Did you wish to see me, madam?" the mayor asked, pausing before her.

"Yes, sir," was the faint reply. "Are you Justin Gilbert?"

"I am."

"Then, I have come to ask a favor of you—more properly, a humane mercy."

"Indeed? But, who am I to understand you are?"

"I am one who has passed through years of bitterest suffering and remorse for the one false step I took in years by-gone, and who, now, when growing old, am sincerely repentant, and seek to be forgiven. Do you know me, Justin Gilbert?"

She quickly raised her veil and revealed her care-worn face.

Evidently the Mayor of Cascade City did recognize her, for he staggered back as if shot.

"Kate Keith!" he gasped, and then sunk into an easy-chair, as if no longer able to stand.

"No, not Kate Keith," she cried, springing forward and kneeling before him with clasped hands, as she gazed tearfully up into his face—

"Not Kate Keith, but Kate Gilbert. Justin, I have come back to you a remorseful, and truly repentant woman. I want you to—I beg and pray of you to forgive me and take me back!"

He gazed at her steadily a moment, his face a study in its changing expressions.

Then he shook his head, slowly, sadly.

"No! no!" he said, in a stern but husky voice; "it cannot be, and you have no right to expect it. Arise, woman, and leave my house! You, of all persons, should have known better than to come here!"

"No! no! Justin, I could not stay away, for I still love you, and always have loved you, as woman never loved man before. Listen to me—hear me out at least, for God's sake!"

"True, I bitterly wronged you years ago, but it was not so much my fault as the human demon who tempted me. I had scarcely taken the step ere I repented it. Knowing the stern, unforgiving nature you possessed, like many another of God's poor sinning creatures, I dared not turn back. You followed, and had your revenge—and a terrible, a humiliating revenge it was."

"I never saw you after that, nor did I see him but I kept track of your whereabouts, and finally, in a revengeful moment, wrote you that when you heard or saw the name of Prince Pistol, you could rest assured I was about to visit vengeance on you and yours!"

Here she paused.

"And so, you have been trying your hand at it, of late?" the mayor observed, with sarcasm.

"No! no! My adopted son, Valentine Vassar, met in the mountains a man who induced him to carry out a vendetta against you. I have never sought to harm you in the least, and have nothing whatever to do with the vendetta. Justin, I am tired and sick of this lonely life, and I pray of you to take me back. I will be dutiful and faithful—ay, I will be your very slave!"

Her pleadings were certainly piteous, and apparently in earnest, but they did not appear to move the mayor.

"No! no!" he said, coldly, "it cannot be. I do not employ slaves, and have now no use for a wife. I had a wife, years ago, but she proved false to me, and I cast her forever from my heart. Your pleadings are utterly in vain, and

I will listen to no more of them. Now, go and live as you have lived, and see that you bother me no more. Go, I say!"

She slowly arose, and gazed at him a moment yearningly, then a fierce, an awful gleam of hatred came into her eyes.

"You have refused me the only boon I craved in life," she hissed, bending forward, and shaking her clinched hand in his face, "and now, beware! The vendetta shall be carried out—I swear it! Ay! it shall be carried out to the bitter end, Justin Gilbert!"

Then she left the room with the haughty carriage of a queen, leaving Cascade's mayor in a rather perturbed state of mind.

CHAPTER XVII.

PRINCE PISTOL KEEPS HIS WORD.

THE day passed quietly, and Deadwood Dick found but little to occupy his attention.

Although he gave every one he met a careful scrutiny, he saw no one who he thought might be Prince Pistol in disguise.

Not having seen Hank Harkness, or having received any description of him, he was of course unable to pick him out from the crowd in general.

He spent the most of his time in sauntering about town, and frequently passed the Gilbert residence in question, as was his intention to do, for he had a premonition that an attempt would be made to rob the mayor of his money.

But the day passed, and night came on, without any event transpiring to arouse his suspicions.

Late in the afternoon, he went to his room at the hotel, and took a nap, for it was his intention to watch the Gilbert residence during the night.

He awoke shortly after dark, and went down to supper.

Then he learned that the town was wild with excitement.

It had been discovered that Sheriff Hopkins was nowhere to be found, and that the condemned prisoner, Richard Bristol, had escaped from jail.

Owing to the fact of Hopkins's absence from the camp, every one coincided in the theory that the sheriff and his prisoner had fled together, and loud were the threats against the guardian of the peace.

Should he ever be found, it was reasonably sure no mercy would be shown him, but that he would be strung up to the limb of a tree.

Dick could scarcely repress a smile, as he passed among the excited crowds, after supper, and heard the remarks derogatory to himself and Sheriff Hopkins; but his disguise was so perfect that he had no fear of being recognized in his true character, and so felt perfectly at ease.

Later in the evening, he kept the Gilbert residence constantly under his surveillance.

But he was a little too late, in this.

Some ten minutes before he took up his watch, a man had entered the dwelling.

Justin Gilbert was seated in the library, in the rear of the parlor, when the door bell rung, and a servant directly appeared at the door.

"A man at the door, who gives the name of Hank Harkness, wishes to see you, sir!" was the announcement.

"Show him in," the mayor instantly replied, and a few seconds later, Harkness entered the room.

Gilbert was upon his feet, in an instant.

"My daughter?" he interrogated.

"Is safe and well, and will be here shortly, under escort," was the reply, as Harkness seated himself.

"Under escort, you say?"

"Yes. She was rescued by some old scout. I met the party, when two-thirds of the way to the rendezvous, and your daughter commissioned me to hasten on in advance of them, and announce her coming."

"God be praised!" Gilbert ejaculated sinking back in his chair. "This is indeed good news."

"Yes, I should say so, and I'm only too glad to be the advance courier to bring it," Harkness replied, with apparent candor.

"Have you perfected any of the plans for your departure, sir?"

"Have I? Well, I should say so!" the mayor replied, jubilantly. "Sold out, slick and clean, and got the tin!"

"Indeed! You're in luck. I would not have thought you could have disposed of so large a property as yours must have been on so short a notice, and for cash, at that."

"But I did, though! Of course I had to make a big sacrifice—only got a hundred and fifty thousand for what was actually worth double the amount; but then, considering that I had over fifty thousand in cash besides, I am not so badly situated as I might be."

The mayor had been indulging pretty freely in some of his good wines, and was more communicative than he otherwise would have been.

"Yes; I should say you ought not complain at being the possessor of such a sum—I know I should not," Harkness observed. "If I had so much about me, I shouldn't want folks to know it, for fear I'd be robbed."

"Oh! there's little danger. No one knows I have so much money; and besides, I've got it put carefully away about my person, and am well armed."

"Even firearms sometimes amount to nothing when one encounters a desperate, determined man. Justin Gilbert, I want that money! Utter a sound, or make a defensive move, and I'll kill you where you sit! I mean what I say—so heed!"

Harkness had sprung to his feet, and two full-cocked revolvers in his grasp were leveled at the mayor's heart.

Gilbert was horrified beyond measure.

He saw it all now. He had been trapped—victimized!

He tried to speak, but could not. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth; his eyes seemed starting from their sockets, as he realized his terrible position.

"Gilbert," Harkness went on, "you have a desperate man to deal with now, and I trust you will realize it and govern yourself accordingly. I am Prince Pistol, the executor of Storm Cloud's vendetta. I never fail in what I undertake. You are completely in my power. You have but one servant in the house, and I could kill her as easily as I can you."

"Now, listen: It was in my contract with Storm Cloud that I should first reduce you to beggary, and then murder you. This I do not propose to do, at least if you come to terms. Give me every cent of money you have in the world, and the vendetta is then ended, and you have your life and a chance to rebuild your fortunes. Refuse to comply with this request, and I will murder you where you sit, rob you, and the vendetta of the Indian Hermit will indeed have been fulfilled."

"Now, which shall it be? Will you fork over to the last dollar, and thereby save your life, or shall I fill your heart full of cold lead, and have your money in the bargain? The time by the clock on the mantle there is two minutes of eight; when the minute hand reaches the figure twelve I will fire, if you wish to die!"

Justin Gilbert was white and trembling with terror.

"Will you swear not to harm me, if I give up the money?" he gasped.

"Yes."

"Then, you shall have it. I cannot lose my life for the sake of money!"

"You are sensible. Count the money out for me on the table, so I may see that it is right, and remember that at the slightest movement on your part to draw a weapon, I'll blow your brains out."

"You need not fear!" was the faint answer.

Gilbert then began to disgorge.

From different parts of his clothing, he drew forth packet after packet of bills, and piled them up, on the table.

Prince Pistol watched him, narrowly, and with gleaming eyes.

At least, the money pile aggregated the round sum of two hundred thousand dollars.

"Any more?" the prince demanded.

"Only fifty dollars. For God's sake, don't rob me of that!"

"Shell out. I shall have all!"

With a groan Gilbert obeyed, and sunk back in his chair, weak and helpless.

Prince Pistol coolly gathered up the money, and stuffed it into his different pockets.

Then, he backed away until he had reached the door opening into hall.

"Justin Gilbert," he said, "you have panned out beautifully, but I am sorry to tell you that one part of my work remains undone. Take that!"

He raised his revolver and fired; then bounded out into the hall, through the front door, and out into the starry night.

Away he sped, at a swift run, looking neither right, left, nor behind.

And like a flitting shadow, a dark figure followed him!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WAY OF THE TRANSGESSOR.

UNCONSCIOUS that he was pursued, Prince Pistol fled direct to the isolated cabin occupied by Kate Keith.

Three raps upon the door brought the woman to open it, and he was admitted.

"Bar the door, heavily!" he ordered, as he sat down upon one of the stools, panting for breath.

"Why, what has happened?" she demanded, as she obeyed the order.

"The devil's to pay! I tried to get the money out of him. He refused and I dropped him. Then, as the servant was away, I ransacked the house from top to bottom, but failed to find a dollar?"

Kate Keith surveyed him, keenly, with her burning eyes.

"You are lying to me, Val!" she said.

"No, by heaven, I am not. I failed to find as much as a cent. Either Gilbert hid the money, or else he sent it away by the Wells-Fargo Express, this afternoon. But, I must not tarry here. Kate, I must have money to flee the country. The crime has been discovered, the camp is thoroughly aroused, and even now, an active search is being made for me. Guards have been thrown out in every direction, and if I escape at all, I shall have to kill one of the guards."

"Kate, I must have money to go East—I must have it I say. You must let me have what you have got!"

"What I have got? Why, I have no money, man!"

"Bah! don't lie to me, for it is useless. You have got money, and I know it. For years you have been hoarding up your earnings, and by this time it stands to reason you have accumulated a good-sized boodle."

I want it, must have it—ay! and will have it!"

He had sprung to his feet, and drawn and cocked a revolver, which he held leveled at her heart.

"It will be useless for you to try to deceive or parley with me!" he said, grimly. "You know I am a desperate man, always. Now, I am doubly desperate. I must get out of this country, to save my life. So fork over your cash, or I'll kill you and get your money besides!"

"I tell you I have no money!" she repeated, fiercely, "and if I had, I'd be a fool to give it to you. Be gone! Valentine Vas ar, while you have time, for you will get no money here!"

"Won't I?" he gritted. "We shall see. He whom you brought up in crime is not incapable of murder, to save his own life. You have until I count five, to shell out. One!"

"Never will I give you a cent!" she hissed, turning dark with rage. "Kill me if you dare, you hell-hound!"

"Two!" he said, grimly, running his eye along the barrel of his weapon.

"Three!"

"Four!"

A pause!

"Will you yield, Kate Keith?" he demanded.

"Never!" the determined reply.

"Very well. Then take the consequences of your rashness. Five!"

The next instant a jet of fire from his weapon was followed by a sharp report.

Kate Keith threw up her arms with a scream of human agony, and toppled over backward.

She never stirred, after striking the floor.

Death had been instantaneous.

Prince Pistol stood over her a moment, in awed silence.

"Twice a murderer. But, it had to be so. Now, for her money!"

Kneeling beside her, he began to search her person for the wealth for which he had committed the crime.

The shadowy figure that had followed the outlaw to the cabin, was, of course that of Deadwood Dick Junior.

He had been lurking outside the Gilbert residence, had heard the pistol-shot within, had seen Vassar, or Harkness hasten from the house and understood all. Like a sleuth-hound he followed the assassin to the cabin; then back to the Ruthven, as fast as his legs could carry him, went the detective.

Into the saloon he dashed, and sprung upon a card-table.

"Gentlemen of Cascade, attention!" he cried. "A foul crime has just been committed. Your citizen, Justin Gilbert, has been robbed and murdered by the mountain outlaw, Prince Pistol. I have tracked the murderer to the last cabin, at the southern end of town! I want a

score of you to accompany me, to assist in his capture. Follow me, at once, and above all make no noise, lest the cuss escapes us!"

There was a yell of assent, and when Dick hurried from the saloon, a hundred grim, revengeful men followed in his wake.

The cabin was soon reached, and silently surrounded. The proceeding had been conducted with the utmost silence.

A light burned within the cabin. Some one was still there.

By Dick's order, twenty of the men procured a heavy log, for a battering-ram, and at a given signal, they made a rush against the door.

It was but a slimy affair, and went in with a crash.

Dick was the first to clear the threshold, and was in time to see Vassar rising from beside the dead body of Kate Keith.

With a yell the detective leaped forward, and clutching the outlaw by the throat, bore him backward to the floor, falling on top of him.

A severe struggle no doubt would have taken place, only that ready hands came to Dick's assistance, and in less time than it takes to tell it, Prince Pistol, King of the West, was a prisoner. Dick then arose.

He was still in his disguise of Bill Jinks.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this man, who has called himself Prince Pistol, has committed two foul murders to-night. Further than to recover from him the money he robbed Justin Gilbert of, I, as a detective, have naught to do. I then turn him over to you, the people."

There was a grim murmur of assent at this.

Dick knelt beside the prisoner, and removed all the money from his person, transferring it to his own pockets.

Then, rising, he said:

"You can do with the prisoner as you like. I must hasten to the Gilbert residence."

The crowd parted and allowed him to pass out; then, with a howl of rage, they pounced upon the doomed outlaw, and dragged him from the cabin, by the heels.

Valentine Vassar knew that it was all up with him.

The determined faces of his captors more than told him this.

They dragged him some distance over the rough ground, until they came to a suitable tree, when a strong rope was quickly affixed over a stout limb.

Vassar was now lifted to his feet, and the fatal noose adjusted about his neck.

And that was the end of Prince Pistol.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE END OF THE VENDETTA.

DEADWOOD DICK, JR., hastened rapidly to the Gilbert residence.

There was a large crowd on the outside, but Old Avalanche stood upon the doorsteps, and refused them admission.

A word from Dick to the scout, and he was permitted to enter.

On entering the parlor, a rather unexpected sight met his gaze.

Upon a couch, partly bolstered up with pillows, lay Justin Gilbert, his face as white as the sheet that covered him, while his eyes possessed an unnatural brilliancy.

Kneeling upon the floor, weeping bitterly, was his daughter, Gracie; while, a little way off, stood Sunshine and Jimmy Junebug, with tearful eyes.

Gilbert noticed the detective the moment he entered, and motioned him to approach.

"Come near," he said, in a husky voice. "I am glad you have come, for I have something to tell you. The vendetta is ended. I have been robbed, and wounded unto death. My assassin has escaped—"

"No, he has not!" Dick interrupted, gently. "He has been captured, and ere now has paid the penalty of his crimes, Judge Lynch being his executioner."

"And the money—"

"Has been recovered, and is now in my possession."

"Thank God. I owe this to you!"

"Don't mention it. I read Harkness, better than you did. Are you badly wounded?"

"Yes, I can live but a short time. I do not bleed externally, but am all filling up inside. The vendetta is indeed ended; but, before I pass away, I want to explain what none of you know—tell you the story of my life. The story Storm Cloud told to Avalanche was false, in every particular, and the names he gave were fictitious.

"But, I must be brief, as my strength is failing. Gather near, all of you, and listen to my last words."

"Years ago, in the city of Louisville, Kentucky, there were two brothers of us, Justin and Jasper Gilbert. We were twins, but did not greatly resemble each other.

"At the age of two-and-twenty, we were successfully engaged in business, our deceased father having given us a good start in life.

"It was about this time that I met, and on short acquaintance, married Kate Keith, a beautiful girl. She had been married to a gambler two years before our union to me, but had obtained a divorce, and at the time I took her for better or worse, she was the mother of an infant girl. Yonder maiden"—pointing to Sunshine, "is her offspring.

"The first months of our married life were pleasant, and she bore me in due time, a baby girl—Gracie, here. About a month after this event transpired, she and the child of her first marriage disappeared. At the same time, Jasper absconded, taking with him all the firm's available cash, and nearly ruining me.

"Backed by a party of indignant citizens, who were staunch friends of mine, I set out in pursuit. We struck their trail, and hunted far into the South. Here we at last found them, living together in a hut on the banks of the Mississippi.

"I had sworn to be revenged for the disgrace put upon my fair name, and vengeance I had in dead earnest.

"The guilty pair were stripped to the waist and horse-whipped, each receiving forty lashes. They were then tarred and feathered, and left in their shame. They both swore vengeance, but I neither saw nor heard of them, until I received a letter from Kate, saying I was doomed and Prince Pistol would be my executioner. Later I learned of the vendetta, and knew Storm Cloud was my brother Jasper."

The mayor spoke further of the visit he had received from Kate Keith; blessed all who were present, and expressed it as his dying wish that Gracie and Sunshine ever be as sisters to each other.

He directed that his fortune go to Gracie, and that she reward Dick, Avalanche, and Jimmy Junebug.

Then, about the midnight hour, his spirit passed away to that bourn from whence none returneth.

The vendetta, inspired by the mountain Hermit was indeed ended.

A few words will chronicle what remains to be told.

The mayor's remains were laid away to rest, a couple of days later, and all Cascade was in mourning.

The bodies of Valentine Vassar and Kate Keith were also, out of humanity's sake, treated to decent interment.

Gracie received her little fortune from Dick, and liberally rewarded both him and Old Avalanche, and Jimmy Junebug was not overlooked by the grateful girl.

Sunshine secured the treasure left behind by Storm Cloud, and converting it into greenbacks, had a fortune that quite sufficed for every possible contingency.

She and Gracie started on a trip through the East, in quest of a new home.

The three outlaws whom Avalanche and Jimmy had brought to Cascade were given brief trials and then—Judge Lynch again had a job to attend to.

One bright morning, a week later, three persons, well mounted and armed, rode out of Cascade City, in all probability never to return.

They were Deadwood Dick Junior, Old Avalanche, and Jimmy Junebug, page to the Terrible Triangle.

THE END.

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